

ALMOST AMERICANS'
GENDER AND EXILE/ETHNIC CUBAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

By

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This study investigates the gendered dimensions of ethnic identity in Cuban American poetry and prose -- a complex body of literature in the process of effecting a transition from an exile-national to an ethnic-minority literature. The primary area of interest includes an analysis of work produced by several generations of writers who arrived in the United States as children or young adults and who write primarily in English. They also exhibit a distinct sense of dual cultural identity often marked by the use of bi-lingual code-switching. This study is the first of its kind to locate Cuban American writing literature within a tradition of ethnic-minority literature and the first to attend to the gendered dimension Cuban American identity in a sustained historical manner. This study will also be the first to examine the literature of a nascent group of Cuban American writers -- those born in the U.S. Their work reveals a complex body of as yet unrecognized poetry and prose which alternates between exile-identified and ethnic-minority sensibilities.

A substantive study of formulations of ethnic identity in Cuban American literature has yet to be published. With few exceptions, extant anthologies and analyses of Cuban

American literature have, thus far, tended to configure Cuban American identity specifically as a kind of post-1959 exile identity -- a historically privileged and problematic category. These a-historical, exile-identified texts and assumptions about Cuba and have dominated literary, academic and cultural productions -- with disturbing and dangerous results. In this study, however, I define Cuban American identity in more complex terms -- as fluid, transnational, contested and historically situated rather than grounded in fixed geopolitical or territorial boundaries.

Cuban-American subjectivity does not arise all at once after the 1959 Cuban revolution. Rather, I argue, a literature marked by a clearly biculturated sense of ethnic Cuban-American subjectivity can be traced to writing produced both in the States and in Cuba over the last several centuries. I define Cuban American literature not in terms of geopolitical or temporal limits, but as a complex body of work possessing a distinct constellation of characteristics which differentiates it from Cuban national and Cuban exile literature. Exile-identified authors like Gustavo Pérez Firmat have tended to dominate the field of publication. Their work, however, tends to continue in the vein earlier Cuban exile literature, particularly in its attempts to distance itself from other U.S. Hispanic writing, its Castro fixation and its attempt to preserve "traditional" Cuban values.

A more marginal group of Cuban America writers has recently emerged who have clearly begun the transition from exiles to ethnics. This innovative group of writers includes Ruth Behar, Coco Fusco, Achy Obejas, Rafael Campos and others. They have only begun to publish as substantially as their exile-identified contemporaries, but their work already represents a critical, pivotal point in the emergence of Cuban American

literature. Their work articulates a distinctly “ethnic” sense of self that proves transgressive. These authors and artists have done much to disrupt and re-write the exile community’s vision of itself, especially in their desire to normalize relations with Cuba. It is the gendered dimension of Cuban American identity that forms the central aspects of my study.

CHAPTER 1
NO TIENE NOMBRE: ALMOST AMERICANS

Coming to Terms: Defining Cuban American Literature

Before the embargo, Cubans and North Americans routinely populated one another's worlds, often in ways that helped form and deform ideas about one another. My mother once told me a story I had never heard before and that she has never repeated again. When she was a child, she and her younger brother Luis had a little skiff they loved to row into Santiago Bay. Their father, a ship's captain for an American company, had always warned the children not to approach the American naval ships anchored in the port.

One day, my mother and her brother, unable to contain their curiosity, rowed near one of the American vessels. They rowed up to the giant ship, wide-eyed with fear and fascination at what seemed like a city made of steel. They were so lost in their amazement that they did not hear naval men in a water taxi settle in behind them. The men, still clearly drunk from their time on shore, grabbed my mother and her brother and dangled them easily over the water, then dropped them back into their little boat. My mother began to cry, all the while shouting in her best English, "My father, my father" and pointing to her father's ship on the other side of the bay, a heart-breaking appeal to patriarchy's empty promise of protection. Her brother took to smacking a soldier on the hand with the tin can the children used to bail water. All the while, the soldiers laughed and laughed. My mother says that she and her brother never spoke of it again, nor did they tell anyone--their sense of humiliation, powerlessness and shame complete. They

never went near the navy ships again, terrified of the tall, cocksure Americans. And yet, only a decade later, my mother almost married an American boy named Henry from New York. (Her father was supremely pleased with the match, but her brother was inconsolable.)

For decades before the Spanish-American War, which temporarily put Cuba under American "protection," American institutions dominated Cuban culture and history. Indeed, American military intervention in Cuba in 1898 represented the fulfillment of a long pattern of "interest" in the island. According to Louis Pérez, Jr., beginning in the early nineteenth century--when North Americans began to think of themselves as a nation--Cuba "became implicated in North American meditations on power" ("The Circle of Connections" 164). In 1808, during the first stirrings of Manifest Destiny, President Jefferson, having just doubled the size of the United States through the Louisiana Purchase, sent General James Wilkinson to Cuba to attempt to buy Cuba from Spain. In 1823, the United States acquired Florida from Spain, expanding the territory of the Republic to within 90 miles of Cuba. That year, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams argued that the likelihood of U.S. annexation of Cuba was a matter of natural law. In fact, he described Cuba as a kind of fruit ripe for the picking.¹ "Cuba was a means of fulfillment. Cuba was subsumed into the collective national identity, a prism through which North Americans saw themselves and their future, and linked directly to the North American sense of security" ("The Circle of Connections" 164). For hundreds of years,

¹ In a letter to Minister to Spain Hugh Nelson, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams wrote that "there are laws of political as well as of physical gravitation; and if an apple severed by the tempest from its native tree cannot choose but fall to the ground, Cuba, forcibly disjoined from its own unnatural connection with Spain . . . can gravitate only towards the North American Union, which by the same law of nature cannot cast her off from its bosom" (Franklin 5).

commercial, structural, familial, affective and imaginative ties between Cuba and North America were seen as so "natural" that maps of Cuba were included in maps of Florida and vice versa. As Cuban historian Louis Pérez, Jr. puts it, Cubans and Americans have "long occupied a place in each other's imaginations and in their respective fantasies about each another" ("Circle of Connections," Bridges to Cuba 6).

Following Pérez, Jr., I hold that Cuban literature did not emerge in splendid isolation, nor did Cuban American literature emerge after the 1959 revolution, as studies and collections tend to suggest. I argue that Cuban American literature and culture arose as a complex set of North American, Continental and Cuban texts and representations shaped by, for and against one another at particular historical moments and in the context of U. S. expansionism, especially at the turn of the century when the U.S. was first becoming a world power. A literature marked by a clearly biculturated sense of Cuban American subjectivity can be traced to writing produced in the States and in Cuba over, at least, the last two centuries--in both the early Cuban communities in New York, Tampa and Key West and by bilingual, bicultural Cuban nationals educated in the U.S. and conversant with U.S. consumer culture.

Despite two hundred years of such Cuban America communities, Cuban and American literature is rarely examined in a comparative manner. A review of critical studies reveals only a handful of comparative literary studies, including Martha Cobb's Harlem, Haiti, and Havana, a critical study of Langston Hughes, Jacques Romaine and Nicolás Guillén (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1979) and a few works addressing the influence of Whitman, Waldo Frank and various other North American authors on Cuban intellectuals.

Comparative scholarship addressing the influence of the United States on Cuba has tended to originate in the fields of political science and history, typically with little attention to cultural productions like literature. A few notable exceptions exist, including historian Cathy Duke's The Idea of Race: the Cultural Impact of American Intervention in Cuba, 1898-1912 (San Juan: University of Puerto Rico Press, 1983) and Jules Benjamin's The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution: An Empire of Liberty in an Age of National Liberation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). Robin Moore's outstanding Nationalizing Blackness: Afrocubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997) investigates the vogue of Afro-Cuban music, art and, to some extent, literature in the context of negritude movements in the United States and Europe. Historian Louis A. Pérez's extensive body of research and scholarship, too, goes beyond traditional methods and scope of his field, and includes books like Cuba and the United State: Ties of Singular Intimacy (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990). His recent On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality and Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), in which he argues that before 1959, becoming Cuban implied becoming American, is particularly useful for the purposes of this study.

Moreover, literary studies and collections tend to focus almost exclusively on Cuban American writing produced after the 1959 revolution. For instance, in the introduction to Veinte años de literatura cubanoamericana (Tempe: Bilingual Press 1988), the earliest anthology of Cuban American writing, editors Silvia Burunat and Ofelia García note that "ethnic" Cuban American literature began during the "massive" migrations of the nineteenth century. However, they include in the collection only those writers who arrived in the United States between 1959 and 1970. In the second collection

of Cuban American writing, Los Atrevidos: Cuban American Writers (Princeton: Linden Lane Press, 1988), editor Carolina Hospital also includes only post-1959 authors. Delia Poey and Virgil Suárez' Little Havana Blues: An Anthology of Cuban American Writing (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1996) includes only post-1959 authors, with the exception of one entry by José Yglesias, born in the earlier Ybor City community of Tampa, Florida. Alvarez-Borland's recent book of criticism, Cuban American Literature of Exile: From Person to Persona (University Press of Virginia, 1998), continues in this trend.

These collections have tended to define Cuban American literature almost exclusively in the context of the first waves of "golden exiles" after the 1959 revolution, ignoring important and clearly biculturated writers of nineteenth-century communities. They have also largely ignored authors who arrived after the first two waves of post-1959 immigration--those writers came to the U.S. during the Mariel boatlift of 1980 and during the *basero* crisis of the early 1990s. In this way, collections and anthologies have tended to reproduce binary frameworks of national identity. As Maria del los Angeles Torres, puts it, Cuban Studies has been marked by the same fault lines created by the Cold War. A Diaspora Studies approach to the topic has only recently emerged (Torres, Land of Mirrors 42, 20).

Moreover, Cuban American literature has been dominated by the work of the so-called 1.5 generation of authors, that is, those who arrived in the States as children or young teenagers after the 1959 Cuban revolution. These largely exile-identified authors tend to write from a decidedly uncomplicated anti-communist position. Like earlier Cuban exile writers, they have continued to define Cuban American literature and culture in dangerous and damaging nationalist terms. In effect, they are complicit in a politics that continues to separate Cubans in the U.S. and on the island and which has caused

suffering and privation for *el pueblo de Cuba*. Critical studies have failed almost entirely to consider the literature of Cuban American writers born in the United States, but have continued to privilege reductive categories of identity like place of birth, denying the complexities of cultural identity.

In this study, I examine the ways in which Cuban American identity has been imagined in acutely gendered terms, including the language of familial and romantic love, honor and sexual violence in a neo-colonial North American context. I extend the work of Robin Moore and Louis Pérez to examine Cuban American literature in a comparative context. Moore and Louis Pérez provide crucial insights on Cuban race and national identity, specifically in the context of North American institutions and practices. Moore and Louis Pérez do attend to gender, but gender is not the primary focus of these two studies.

Scholarship addressing gender, race and Cuban national identity are numerous. Scholars like Lynn Stoner, Vera Kutzinski, Jean Stubbs, Verena Martinez-Alier have produced excellent feminist scholarship, but their work does not address Cuban national identity in a comparative Cuba/United States context in a sustained fashion. Helen I. Safa's introduction to "Race and National Identity in the Americas" in Latin American Perspectives (May, 1998) is one of the few to address gender, race and Cuban national identity in a comparative manner.

I combine and extend these studies to analyze gender, race and nation in a comparative context. I maintain that it is primarily at the axis of gender that the race and class configurations of Cuban American identity become most visible, and it is primarily at the level of gender that the contradictions, cruelties and constraints of these discourses reveal themselves. I also extend recent feminist scholarship on identity and nation-

building, much of which has been generated as a response to Benedict Andersen, to the Cuban American case, particularly the work of Anne McClintock, Doris Sommer and Patricia Yaeger. I apply feminist theory and to some degree, post-colonial theory to investigate the complex intersections of gender, race, class and nation simultaneously to trace the gendering of Cuban American exile-national and ethnic-minority literature and identity.

I discover, regrettably, that Cuban American identity continues to be written in troubling eighteenth and nineteenth-century terms, that is, in terms of women's racially classified bodies, romantic and familial metaphors, paternalistic codes of honor and other gendered narrative strategies with a long and troubling tradition. Early nationalist figures like the sexualized *mulata* and the whitened republican mother resurface in Cuban exile literature and in the Cuban revolutionary society against which exiles define themselves. It also re-circulates in the literature of exile-identified Cuban American writers, who articulate a bicultural sense of self fully in keeping with the exile nationalism of the previous generation.

I examine the work of Cuban American writers, including nineteenth-century authors who arrived in the United States during the wars of independence (1868-1878 and 1895-1898). This complex constellation of poets, critics and fiction writers exhibits a distinct sense of dual identity, often, though not exclusively marked by the use of bilingual code-switching. Their literature shares a distinct constellation of characteristics that distinguishes it as Cuban American, rather than Cuban exile writing. Cuban American writing departs, to varying degrees and with important exceptions, from elegiac exile literature. Of the post-1959 Cuban exile writers, most, like Severo Sarduy, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Eugenio Florit and others, consider themselves "Cubans"

writing outside of Cuba, rather than Cuban Americans. They arrived as adults, continue to write almost entirely in Spanish and their writing is concerned primarily with reconstructing the Cuba of their memories or fantasies of returning to a "freed" Cuba (Havana USA 172).

However, the work of exile-identified Cuban American authors, whose work has dominated the publishing field, continues in the vein of earlier Cuban exile literature, particularly in its Castro fixation and in its attempt to preserve a set of "traditional" Cuban values. Their work clearly articulates a biculturated sense of self. However, they also equate "authentic" Cuban American identity with an anti-Castro position. Their work also evidences a distinct "world vision" which "ignores or rejects the conditions of marginalization from the mainstream under which the other Hispanic native groups operate" ("Sugarcane Memories" 165 - 166). In other words, they do not consider themselves minority writers, but adhere to an idea of Cuban exceptionalism that defines Cubans as "different" from other U.S. Latino groups.

Moreover, to a startling degree, the nostalgia narratives and coming-of-age memoirs of authors like Gustavo Pérez Firmat persist in the acutely gendered dimensions of Cuban exile national politics, even as they construct a complex sense of biculturated self. Pérez Firmat, especially, equates Cuban American -ness with an explicit exile sensibility predicated on access to racially classified women's bodies.

Like author and critic Eliana Rivero, I hold that the difference between a Cuban exile writer and a Cuban American writer include not only the native use of English and the "full consciousness and practice of dualism" but a "sense of belonging to an ethnic minority" ("Sugarcane Memories" 179). Fully Cuban American writers express a sense of "hybridism, or even alienation with respect to the predominant Anglo culture." It is

precisely at "this juncture . . . that Cubans begin the process of becoming Cuban American s" ("Sugarcane Memories" 168).

Important if underrepresented ethnic-identified writers like Achy Obejas, for instance, fully belong to that generation of younger writers of Cuban heritage who, in the words of Eliana Rivero, "are in the midst of effecting a transition from émigré/exile categories to that of ethnic minorities" ("Sugarcane Memories" 166). Their work represents a pivotal point in the emergence of Cuban American literature. Ethnic-identified poetry and prose differ most notably from exile-identified Cuban American writing in terms of the level of engagement in nostalgia narratives and the manner in which the author positions his or her self in relation to other U.S. Hispanic groups and the dominant Anglo-American culture. Cuban American authors like Dolores Prida, Achy Obejas and Cristina García directly challenge essentialist tropes, refusing to configure identity in nationalist terms, but rather, positing complex, fluid possibilities based on coalitional, minority identity politics. In fact, the tropes I trace in Cuban and Cuban American literature over the last couple of centuries, like the figure of the *mulata*, become transgressive, radical emblems in the work of these Cuban American writers, whose work challenges the gendered, racially marked categories that uphold the nation.

Moreover, ethnic Cuban American writers especially challenge exile politics in their desire to normalize relations with Cuba. They build emotional and artistic bridges to Cuba and travel to the island in an attempt to reconcile their personal histories. Many employ "disruptive" techniques that reflect and advance complex, transgressive and transnational literary projects. They defy and disrupt geo-political, artistic and emotional borders between Cubans on both sides of the Florida Straits--the ninety-mile border that represents more than a geographic feature or boundary. The "disjunctive metaphor" of the

Florida Straits also serves to represent the "ideological chasm" between Cubans that has long remained as "fixed as the Berlin Wall" (Risech, "Political and Cultural Cross Dressing" 58), an oddly hopeful image now that the Wall has been reduced to rubble. I refer to them as "bridge" writers and examine their work collectively in the last chapter of this study, "Bridge Bodies/Transnational Bodies."

This study follows suit, traveling freely between Cuba and the United States, happily ignoring the embargo and those torturous and arbitrary distinctions of identity that reduce human beings to bits of paper or that privilege biology, birth or "blood." The transnational scope of this study allows me to trace the gendered dimensions of Cuban/American subjectivity and identity in a broad historical context. This allows me to follow the function of troubling traditional nationalist emblems like the figures of the *mulata* and the republican mother—figures that continue to circulate with remarkable potency not only in Cuban American arts and letters, but in texts produced in the context of U.S.-Cuba relations and foreign policy.

Naming Names: Cuban American Communities

Cuban American literature can be said to have begun during the first stirrings of the Cuban wars of independence from Spain in the early nineteenth century. By reason of Spain's continued colonial hold on Cuba, many of Cuba's most important thinkers and statesmen were exiled to, and published in, the United States. José María Heredia, exiled to the U.S. in 1823, wrote and published several volumes of poetry while in New York, including "Niagra," arguably one of the most important lyrical works of the period. Father Felix Varela, an early abolitionist and church reformer, also fled Spanish authorities in 1823 and helped establish a Cuban émigré community in New York. There he founded an exile newspaper and helped to organize the cause for an independent

Cuba. He also wrote and translated textbooks, works of philosophy and science and founded two English-language magazines (A Century of Cuban Writers in Florida 4).

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, significant numbers of Cuban *independistas* and cigar workers arrived in the U.S. and establish themselves in New York, New Orleans, and later Key West and Tampa, producing a small body of Cuban American literature which, while *independentista* in nature, evidenced a nascent bicultural and even bilingual sense of self. During the wars, nearly 10 percent of the Cuban population lived in the United States. Leading intellectuals like José Antonio Saco, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, Antonio Maceo and Máximo Gómez resided within the United States at varying points in the struggle. Even José Martí, the Cuban national hero of mythic proportions, lived longer in the United States than in Cuba (from 1879 – 1895). Writing both in Spanish and English, he published much of the corpus of his poetry, essays and articles from inside the "belly of the beast," that is, while in the United States (A Century of Cuban Writers xiv). His work, like that of Varela and Heredia, however, has been largely ignored in the context of North American arts and letters.

Nineteenth-century Cuban American enclaves were highly literate in comparison to other immigrant communities of the period. Cuban émigrés placed high value on literary and journalistic achievement, established lyceums, cultural centers, and a great many journals, magazines and newspapers. They also incorporated literature into the fabric of everyday life, particularly through the use of *lectores*, who read novels and newspapers to workers in cigar factories. In 1871, Cuban educators and community leaders in Key West established the first bilingual (and racially integrated school) in the country, the San Carlos Institute, where for over a century, children were taught in English and Spanish. By 1891, the Sisters of St. Joséph School, served the Cuban émigré

(and Italian) population of Ybor City, Florida. The Sisters provided schooling for boys and girls of all denominations, at moderate terms and in English (Quinn, "Nuns in Ybor City" Par. 23). At the end of the War of Independence in 1898, many Cubans, some of whom had lived in the United States for forty years, chose to stay, rather than return to an island that had "become foreign" to them and to their American-born children. They thus transformed the "ethnic enclaves into permanent Cuban American communities" (A Century of Cuban Writers 16).

One would imagine that these early communities produced at least a handful of authors who wrote primarily in English. Few texts however, have been available in print. The Florida Studies Center at the University of South Florida has begun to provide funding for the excavation of this material, but few literary works have been catalogued at present. Arte Público Press has recently begun to make a few more recent texts written by Ybor City authors available as part of their Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Series.

By mid-century, there were considerable numbers of *norte americanos* living in Cuba, as well. American railroad technology arrived on the island in the 1830s. The railroads, manufactured in the United States, were often installed, maintained and serviced by North American crews. In 1855, William Cullen Bryant noted that it was possible to travel through Cuba by railway in a car built in Newark, drawn by an engine made in New York and worked by an American engineer (Letters of a Traveller 373). American neighborhoods popped up all over the island. In 1849 Richard Madden noted that Cardenas and Matanzans had "more the character of American than Spanish settlements" (The Island of Cuba: Its Resources Progress and Prospects 83). North Americans also owned and operated sugar estates, coffee and tobacco plantations, and

cattle ranches in Cuba. U.S. merchants, shipping agents and retailers were active, too. By 1871, George Williams observed that Havana was "overrun" with Americans (Sketches of Traveler in the New and Old World 8).

Additionally, Cuban elites were familiar with and involved in U.S. institutions and practices long before the wars of independence. Many were U.S. educated, attending not only college in the U.S., but private primary and secondary boarding schools. "They even adopted English as their primary language." After the War of 1868, many began to keep their money in U.S. banks and developed a strategy for protecting their wealth by obtaining U.S. citizenship. Inter-marriage between the children of Cubans elites and Americans was not uncommon. And since the children of naturalized Cubans or Cubans and *norte-americanos* living on the island were automatically U.S. citizens, there were thousands of Cuban Americans who had never really lived in the U.S. for any extended period (Olson and Olson, From Trauma to Triumph 44 - 48).

Essentially, what developed over the course of the nineteenth century was the creation of an elite class that had been educated in American schools. They tended to be Protestant or nominal Roman Catholic, conservative in political orientation, intimately linked with the American corporate world by investment or employment and familiar with and faithful to the products and icons of American popular culture. Indeed, they were "almost as much American as they were Cuban" (Olson and Olson, From Trauma to Triumph 34 - 47). After the U.S. occupation of Cuba in 1898, Cuba was substantially integrated in the U.S. economy.² At that point, English became systematically taught in all public schools, and so middle-class Cubans also learned English as a second language.

² Between 1899 and 1905, Americans acquired nearly 60 percent of all rural properties in Cuba (A Nation for All 105). American companies also controlled major industries including banking, public utilities, and mineral rights. By 1927, North

Despite, the existence of bilingual, bicultural communities extending over two hundred years, few literary works were published by Cubans or Cuban American s until the 1980s. The work of José Yglesias is the only exception. In fact, Yglesias published a good many novels in the 1960s and 1970s, including Wake in Ybor City (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), An Orderly Life (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968), In the Fist of the Revolution (New York: Pantheon Press, 1969), Down There (New York: World Publishing Company, 1970), Double Double (New York: Viking Press, 1974) and others. He was first anthologized in 1972 and again in 1975 in Houghton Mifflin's Best American Short Stories. In the 1980s, he published Home Again (New York: Arbor House, 1987) and Tristan and the Hispanics (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989). All his novels went out of print, largely ignored until 1996, when Arte Público began publishing second editions of his early work as part of their series, Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage. In 1999, Arte Público also published his novel The Truth About Them, which begins in Key West in 1890 with the arrival of his grandfather, a working-class cigar maker and union organizer, and his grandmother, an unrepentant "disgraced" aristocrat-anarchist. Despite a career spanning forty years, this prolific and versatile writer is rarely mentioned in studies of Cuban American writing.

The first two post-1959 waves of Cuban immigration to the United States (1959 - 1962 and 1965 - 1973) included several important Cuban authors like Severo Sarduy and Guillermo Cabrera Infante. However, in the 1960s and 1970s, U.S. publishing houses

American mills accounted for over 80 of all sugar production in Cuba, in addition to virtually all railroads, public utilities, construction companies and other "key interests" (Nationalizing Blackness 119). The United States also exerted significant political influence on the island. Only two presidents have come to power without the support of the United States, the liberal candidate Grau San Martín, who came to power in 1933, and briefly at that, and Fidel Castro.

were only occasionally interested in the work of even internationally acclaimed authors like Cabrera Infante. Many sent their manuscripts to Spain and Mexico, where they had only nominally better luck. Indeed, this first-generation body of Cuban exile writing included anti-revolutionary works. Most were dismissed as "propaganda tracts" in Latin America and Europe, where the revolution, still in the first flush of promise, was idealized as the hope of developing countries (Havana USA 172). Even some of the best-known like Lydia Cabrera were forced to finance the publication of their own work (Havana USA 171). By the 1970s, a few publishing houses had been established in New York and Miami, most notably *Ediciones Universales*.

Cuban exile writers clearly consider themselves "Cubans" writing outside of Cuba, rather than Cuban Americans. Their work tends toward nostalgia narratives and focuses on Cuba almost exclusively. As Cabrera Infante put it: "I have not been able to return to Cuba, so I had to invent . . . Havana for myself out of words"(qtd. in Havana USA 171). But by the mid and late 1970s, younger writers began to focus on their experiences in the U.S., finding an early bicultural voice. These young writers, based largely in New York, founded journals such as Nueva generación, Joven Cuba and Areíto. The work of Cuban exile writers like Cabrera Infante, now translated, has found currency in the United States. But the work of their younger, more controversial compatriots today remains almost universally neglected and excluded from anthologies of Cuban American literature.

This new generation of writers arrived in the States as children or young adults during the first two waves and came of age during the counter-culture movement of the era. For them, Cuba was a "beautiful and stirring memory, but they were more and more bound to North American society." Many were politicized within the context of the civil

rights movements and contact with other Latinos. They, too, experienced a sense of alienation in the United States, where, as Leopoldo Hernandez's title character in the 1980 play "Martínez" puts it: "An accent is an illness, at least it hurts like one" (Cuban American Theater 4).

Disturbed by the reactionary and intransigent tone of the exile news media in Miami, these young editors attempted to make their journals a forum for objective discourse. They charged the exile news media and "self-professed leaders of the community with encouraging political intolerance, racial bigotry and sexism" (Havana USA 202). And they tended to criticize exiles for their attempts to duplicate the exploitive society that had contributed to the revolution. In fact, these young writers "perceived themselves as part of a reform tradition" (Havana USA 199).

Moreover, they wanted to analyze the accomplishments of the revolution as well as its short-comings, a radical position in a community where anti-communism tends to shape all discussions. One editor of Joven Cuba wrote: "We young people did not choose to leave Cuba. That was a decision made by our parent's generation . . . it is time for us to study Cuba and the Revolution, and to form our own opinions. We did not know *la Cuba de ayer*" (Havana USA 201). Alienated in Anglo-America and troubled by the reactionary posture of the Cuban exile community, they wanted to be allowed to relate to the contemporary island. They decided that in order to escape from becoming a *generación perdida* or a lost generation, they had to serve as a *generación puente*, that is, a "bridge" between Cubans in the two countries (Havana USA 204).

Areíto, the most controversial of the journals, was founded in 1974 by Lourdes Casal, a gifted writer and professor of psychology. Casal was initially hostile to the Cuban revolution. However, in the early 1970s, she and other members of the Nueva

generación group were invited to Cuba. On her return, she modified her position on the revolution and began working to initiate a dialogue between Cubans on both sides of the Straits. Casal helped establish the Antonio Maceo brigades, which allowed small groups of young Cuban Americans to return to the island to reestablish familial, artistic and intellectual connections. Moreover, the work of Casal helped initiate "*el diálogo*" in 1978, which involved discussions between 140 Cubans living in exile, the Cuban government and the Carter administration. The dialogue resulted in the release of thousands of political prisoners on the island and made smooth the way for the family reunification flights of 1979 and 1980, which allowed Cubans living in the U.S. to visit family members on the island for the first time since the revolution.

Lourdes Casal, in particular, spoke for a generation of Cuban Americans who attempted to reclaim the lost country of their childhood, not by engaging in the nostalgia of the first generation, but by actually traveling to the island in an attempt to reconcile her split sense of self. She recognized that "immigration had left [her] unable to think of home as any one place" (Behar, Bridges to Cuba 10). Her alienation in Anglo American and her departure from nostalgia narratives make her the first post-1959 Cuban American writers in the United States whose work reveals an ethnic rather than exile sensibility. Even her early work points to a clear "recognition of existential and sociocultural hybridism" ("*Sugarcane Memories*" 173). By the early 1970s, she had published scholarly studies in the United States, in addition to poetry and creative short stories. Her work, however, has been largely excluded from anthologies and studies, largely because of her politics. However, more recently, Casal has begun to take her rightful place in Cuban American arts and letters, referred to by a set of radical scholars in the United States, in Europe and Latin America who approach Cuban and Cuban American identity

not in terms of discrete historical periods or national terms, but in transgressive, transnationalist terms. Lourdes continues to lead the way for those few who would build bridges to Cuba.

Like other Latino literatures, Cuban American literary production experienced concurrent literary "booms" in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This revitalization, provoked in part by the many Cuban writers, artists, musicians and filmmakers who arrived in the U.S. in the late 1970s and after the Mariel exodus of 1980, resulted in a literary renaissance. U.S. publishing houses, which had rarely been interested in the work of Cuban and Cuban American authors, began publishing the work of writers like Cabrera Infante, Severo Sarduy, Alejo Carpentier, Herberto Padilla and others in translation³ (Balido, Cubantime 162).

The revitalization also saw the production and publication of another group of texts by bilingual, bicultural writers. Like the Areíto writers, they had arrived in the U.S. as children or young adults and came of age in the U.S. They are, however, largely exile-identified, writing from anti-communist positions. Those authors considered sympathetic to the revolution, like the Nueva generación group, are conspicuously absent from this field of publication.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, Roberto Fernandez published La Vida Es Un Special (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1981) and La montaña rusa (Houston: Arte Público, 1985).

³ See Guillermo Cabrera Infante's Inferno (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), Herberto Padilla's Heroes are Grazing in my Garden (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984) and Alejo Carpentier's The Harp and the Shadow (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1990). English translations of important early Cuban works also appeared during this period, including Juan Francisco Manzano's Autobiography of a Slave (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's anti-slavery novel, Sab (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993) and Fernando Ortiz' Cuban Counterpoint, Tobacco and Sugar (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

Oscar Hijuelos published Our House in the Last World (New York: Persea Books, 1983) and Roberto Fernandez published yet another novel, Raining Backwards (Houston: Arte Público, 1988). In 1989, Elias Miguel Muñoz published Crazy Love (Houston: Arte Público Press) and Virgil Suarez published Latin Jazz (New York: W. Morrow Press). The following year Pablo Medina published Exiled Memories: a Cuban Childhood (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990). In 1991, Dolores Prida published Beautiful Señoritas & Other Plays (Houston: Arte Público Press) and Rodolfo J. Cortina published a collection, Cuban American Theater (Houston: Arte Público Press). In 1993, Ballantine Books, a large, mainstream commercial press, published Cristina García's influential Dreaming in Cuban: A Novel.

These authors clearly consider themselves both Cuban and America. The work of earlier writers like Lourdes Casal and other Areito writers evidenced a similar duality in the early and mid-1970s, but those who began to publish in the late 1980s adopt a less problematic, if more simplistic, posture toward revolutionary Cuba. For that reason, I would argue that the work of exile-identified Cuban American authors who published extensively in the 1980s and 1990s has come to dominate Cuban American literature - to the exclusion of equally important bicultural authors like Lourdes Casal.

Anthology is Destiny

In the introduction to Veinte años de literatura cubanoamericana: 1962 - 1982 (Tempe: Bilingual Press, 1988), the earliest collection of Cuban American authors, editors Silvia Burunat and Ofelia García note that "ethnic" Cuban American literature began during the "massive" migrations of the nineteenth century. However, they chose to include in the anthology only those writers who arrived in the U.S. after the Cuban revolution of 1959, but before 1970, that is, during the first two post-1959 waves. This

editorial choice mirrors Cold War constructions of identity and the polarization of the Cuban and Cuban American communities. It further erects the false sense of Cuban and American culture as separate and distinct from one another. Burunat and García's choice to limit the anthology to an early post-1959 group of authors inadvertently establishes a precedent for the illusion that Cuban American literature sprang up in after 1959 in isolation from the island.

More importantly, Burunat and García's choice to begin the anthology in 1962, specifically at the end of the first wave of "golden exiles," contradicts their rather radical hope for Cuban American literature. The editors, in fact, write that it is their hope that the emerging body of Cuban American literature, complicated by the Mariel authors⁴ and the approaching majority of second-generation authors, might come to challenge the elitist bent of the previous generation of exile writers. They also predict that Cuban American literature will develop elements that align it more closely with other minority literatures. Their hope has in part been realized, as the Mariel writers, like the vilified influx⁵ that produced them, did mark the first clear generational shift in exile Miami, bringing a measure of critical distance to the community.

Burunat and García also speculate that second-generation Cuban American writers would come to challenge the conservative tone of Cuban American literature. These

⁴ The authors exclude the work of Mariel-period authors in the anthology, citing those writers short duration in the U.S. at the time of the writing of the book as outside the scope of their study.

⁵ Unlike the first two waves, the Mariel influx included a great many single men rather than nuclear families. The Mariel population was also darker and poorer and had been educated under communism. Additionally, Castro used el Mariel as an opportunity to rid himself of dissidents, recidivist criminals, the mentally ill and homosexuals. These factors combined to make Mariel refugees seem far more "threatening" than earlier waves.

younger writers, however, have not proven particularly inclined to identify with other minority groups, not has their work departed entirely from the earlier nostalgia narratives of the first-generation exile writers, as we shall see. Finally, Burunat and García restrict their definitions of Cuban American literature to include only work written by authors who resided on the island until at least the age of 10 and who arrived in the U.S. before they were teenagers. They therefore privilege the generation of writers Pérez Firmat has popularized as the 1.5 generation, a group distinctly overrepresented in terms of publication. The majority of their work continues in the vein of earlier exile literature, particularly in its nostalgia narratives and its keen desire to preserve a "traditional" way of life.

Burunat and García argue that Cuban American literature is best characterized by poetry, rather than fiction or drama, as poetry is best "given to the mythical to make sense of exile and dispossession"(11), a claim I have tended to agree with. Certainly, at the time of the publication of Veinte años de literatura cubanoamericana in late 1980s, books of poetry written by Cuban American authors outnumbered published novels and short stories. The collections of poetry tended, however, to be published in Mexico or Spain rather than the United States,⁶ with the exception of the work of Ricardo Pau-Llosa, who published his first collection of poems Sorting Metaphors in 1983 through Anhinga Press at Florida State University.

However, by the late 1980s, the publication of Cuban American poetry slowed to a trickle, largely overshadowed by increased publication of more commercially viable Cuban

⁶ See, for instance, Elias Miguel Muñoz' Desde esta orilla (Madrid: Betania, 1988), Orlando González Esteva's El Pájaro Tras La Flecha (Mexico: Vuelta, 1988), Irida Iturralde's Tropel de espejos (Madrid: Editorial Betania, 1989) and Lourdes Gil's Blanca aldaba preludia (Madrid: Editorial Betania, 1989).

American fiction and essay. The publication of Cuban American fiction continued at a good pace through the 1990s. By the 1990s, larger university presses and North American commercial publishing houses began publishing Cuban American fiction with increasing regularity, including Cristina García's Dreaming in Cuban (New York: Knopf Random House, 1992), Gustavo Pérez Firmat's Life on the Hyphen (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), Virgil Suarez' Spared Angola (Houston: Arte Público, 1997) and others. In the late 1990s, Arte Público also published a second edition of Roberto Fernandez' Raining Backwards. Cristina García published her second novel The Agüero Sisters (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998). The trend continued into the new millennium.⁷

In Cuban American Writers: Los Atrevidos (Princeton: Linden Lane, 1988), the second collection of post-1959 Cuban American literature, Carolina Hospital collects the poetry and fiction of this increasingly well-published group of authors, including Ricardo Pau-Llosa, Gustavo Pérez Firmat, Pablo Medina and Virgil Suarez. Like Burunat and García, Hospital privileges poetry over fiction, including only two short stories in the collection, one by Roberto Fernandez and one by Pablo Medina. Like Burunat and García, Hospital collects only authors of the post-1959 period, again, primarily the 1.5 generation. Hospital's set, which largely abandoned poetry and went on to write fiction and essay, would come to be published far more often than the group Burunat and García select. (Burunat and García's authors did not go on to publish widely, with the exception of and

⁷ In 2000, Gustavo Perez Firmat published his first novel Anything But Love (Houston: Arte Público, 2000) and Pablo Medina published The Return of Felix Nogara (New York: Persea Books, 2000). A second printing of Pablo Medina's Exiled Memories appeared in 2002 (New York: Persea Books). In 2003, Cristina García produced her much-awaited third novel, Monkey Hunting (New York: Knopf Random House). Ana Menendez, born in the United States, has also published a collection of short stories entitled In Cuba I Was German Shepherd (New York: Grove Press), quickly followed by her first novel Loving Che (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2003). And Cuban American fiction has also begun to make inroads in children's and young adults literature.

Eliana Rivero and Roberto Fernandez, who write primarily essay and fiction, respectively. Roberto Fernandez is the only author included in both anthologies).

In some ways, Hospital is more inclusive in her selections than Burunat and García. The latter limit their definition of Cuban American authors to those writers those arrived in the U.S. before 1970, that is, before the migration period that allowed Cubans to enter the United States via Spain. Hospital includes several authors who arrived via Spain, including Elias Miguel Muñoz. Burunat and García also require an author to have lived in the U.S. for at least 10 years before he or she can be considered a Cuban American writer, rather than a Cuban writer in exile. Hospital makes no such distinctions, including authors who arrived in the U.S. a short time before the publication of her collection. Hospital makes no requirement of time of residence in Cuba. In fact, some of the authors arrived quite young, one at the age of two. (She does, however, require her authors to have been born on the island.)

However, Hospital restricts her selection in unstated ways, excluding important authors from her anthology who contributed much to the field. Consciously or not, Hospital equates Cuban American writing with exile, that is, anti-Castro writing. She describes the difficult process of collecting the texts for her anthology, of her "long search for Cuban American writers in the early 1980s" (*Los Atrevidos* 15). She ignores, however, the existence of an important body of Cuban American literature that appeared in the 1970s—including the work of Lourdes Casal, Elian Rivero and other authors less critical of the revolution. Oscar Hijuelos, too, had already published a well-received novel, *Our House in the Next World*, but his fiction is conspicuously absent from the collection, ostensibly because he was born in New York, but more likely because his writing shares more with ethnic minority literature than with Cuban exile literature.

Like Burunat and García, Hospital defines Cuban American literature as marked, of course, by biculturality, by themes both Cuban and American. In the introduction to Los Atrevidos, Hospital defines Cuban American literature as that which represents the "coalescence of two cultures." This, she argues, is the primary attribute which "brings together the texts of the Cuban American s included in the anthology" (15).

Burunat and García distance the Cuban American authors they select from Cuban exile writing. Hospital, however, is careful to locate the work of her authors in close relation to the work of earlier Cuban exile writers. For instance, Hospital points out that the writers she collects are often "dismissed . . . from anthologies and analysis of Cuban exile literature" (16), particularly because of their use of English. She considers their exclusion a "travesty" or injustice. "First of all, they were born in Cuba, and more importantly, they consider themselves Cuban writers" (17). More importantly, Hospital specifically defines Cuban American writing specifically in terms of possessing a "vital exile consciousness" (18).

Hospital, in fact, names the anthology and the group of writers she collects in Los Atrevidos in honor of two "old" Cuban exiles who opened a café by that name in Miami. They called it "Los Atrevidos" because they "dared to ask a bank for a loan" only weeks after arriving in the United States (16). Hospital asserts that the writers who appear in her anthology share their boldness: "they dare to take a risk with their writing" (16). The word "*atrevido*" means, roughly, the forward ones, the bold, saucy or disrespectful ones. However, an *atrevido* is not necessarily a subversive. The term has a certain sassy or playfulness connotation. An *atrevido* may be a pain in the *nalgas*, but they are not exactly dangerous. The authors Hospital collects in the anthology clearly represent a younger, bicultural generation. However, they do not break with the conventions of older

established Cuban exile writers. (I would argue that the authors collected by Burunat and García, particularly Lourdes Casal, proved far more daring.)

Hospital excludes clearly bicultural authors like Lourdes Casal, Oscar Hijuelos and Ileana Rivero from her anthology, but she includes authors whose work does not necessarily evidence biculturality. For instance, Hospital includes the work of Mercedes Limon in the anthology, a poet who arrived in the U.S. almost as an adult and who consequently writes almost entirely in Spanish. Limon's fiercely beautiful anti-communist poetry certainly qualifies her as a writer with an "exile consciousness" (18). But her work, concerned almost entirely with Cuba, does not represent the "coalescence of two cultures," defying Hospital's own definition of an *atrevido* as a distinctly bilingual, bicultural writer. Hospital excludes important authors from her anthology who fit her definition much more closely. Consciously or not, Hospital equates Cuban American writing an anti-Castro position.

The writing collected in Los Atrevidos achieves a certain distance from the established exile community in their use of English and attention to issues of acculturation and bi-culturation, but they also maintain strictly anti-Castro stances, articulating the exile community's political agenda. Many draw their material from the exile press and its accounts of Cuba. For instance, Ricardo Pau-Llosa's, a well-know Miami poet and art critic whose work appears in Los Atrevidos, employs his collection of poetry, Cuba, to "shake" his "fist against Fidel" ("La Hora de los Mameyes" 92) and to vilify tourists who travel to the island. In "Conscience," he juxtaposes a quote by Nelson Mandela (in which Mandela defends Castro's support of African nationalism) against a poem in which Pau-Llosa describes boys being raped by guards in Cuban jails--as recounted by exile radio announcers, notorious for their unreliability and sensationalism.

Moreover, Pau-Llosa signs the dedication page of his collection, "Miami/Exilio/Octubre 1990," an odd position for someone who arrived in the United States as a child, as "exile" presupposes persecution and a conscious decision to leave one's homeland in opposition to a government.

Omar Torres, a prolific⁸ Cuban American writer whose work is not included in Los Atrevidos, explores the motives of those Cuban Americans who emigrated young but who become "embroiled in exile politics" (Havana USA 178). In Fallen Angels Sing, his narrator asserts that for those who left Cuba as children, "to be obsessed" like our parents or to engage in the attempt to discredit Castro is quite unusual, quite "odd" (qtd. in Havana USA 178). Torres concludes that these atypical young "exiles" engage in exile politics because they are trying to invent a past for themselves. "They are pulled to the myth of a country . . . a nostalgic longing for something they never had, but wish they had . . . They were right-wing in their political thinking because the left had taken over their places . . . Given the right circumstances they could, perhaps be more liberal than any man, more progressive than any man, but not as pariahs (qtd. in Havana USA 179). Clearly, Carolina Hospital's definition of Cuban American literature as possessing "exile consciousness" situates the writers his collection in a particular political field.⁹ In fact, many of the writers she collects affirm reactionary Cuban exile nationalist

⁸ In the 1980s, Omar Torres, a contemporary of Hospital's writers, published Línea en Diluvio (New York: Niurklen, 1981), De Nunca a Siempre: Poemas (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1981), Apenas un Bolero: Novela (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1981) and Al Partir (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1986.)

⁹ Virgil Suarez and Delia Poey, editors of Little Havana Blues, also define Cuban American literature as springing from the "condition of exile" because the "prospect of returning" to the island, which "looms" over the community, has remained an "impossibility" under the "current regime" (11). Their introduction, at least, acknowledges the contentious relationship between the Cuba and the United States. And

politics that approach Cuba in troubling and dangerous terms. Many, particularly Ricardo Pau-Llosa and Gustavo Pérez Firmat, persist in the acutely gendered dimensions of Cuban exile nationalist politics, even as they constructs a complex sense of biculturated self.

In its need to preserve Cuban culture, Miami exiles (re)created a "mirror image of a Havana that they believe existed before Fidel Castro and his minions did away with the things they . . . held dear" (Monteagudo, "Miami, Florida" 780), that is, a sort of fantasy island with highly conservative overtones and a nation-at-war mentality--a Havana, USA. Generally, immigrants arrive in the United States to settle and build new lives. Cubans came to wait. They had every intention of returning to Cuba when Castro fell, an expectation that seemed reasonable given the United States' history of intervention on the island. I always felt as though my parents were waiting for their real lives to begin again. And I also recall feeling a kind of survivor's guilt, reminded that my family members in Cuba were suffering privation under communism, a feeling I have never been able to shake.

The mirror image of Cuba exiles created in Miami proved rather disorienting in many ways. After all, to live in Havana, U.S.A., you have to exist in two places and times at once, the U.S. and Cuba, circa 1958. Moreover, early on, the image of Cuba began to attain mythical dimensions in the exile community. It became a surreal mind-space where the fruit was always sweeter, the fields more fecund, the children well-behaved.

And to make matters more confusing, Cuba fell off the edge of the earth in 1959. Indeed, everyone's memories, the stories they told, end abruptly in 1959, as if Havana has

the anthology includes authors from earlier communities, like José Yglesias, as well as those born in the United States, including Oscar Hijuelos. Lourdes Casal is, again, absent.

simply evaporated in the tropical heat on the day Castro's soldiers arrived in Havana. Until *el diálogo* of 1978, no one had actually traveled back to Cuba and returned to tell about it. How could I be sure it still existed? The fact that there was no regular mail or phone service to Cuba accentuated this feeling. To call to Cuba, one placed a call to the operator, who returned the call via a third country, typically in the middle of the night - like those midnight calls we all dread announcing deaths and other tragedies. Our calls were also marked by strange beeps, whirring noises and echoes that I recall making me feel as if I were speaking to someone in outer space or underwater.

For most exiles, "reinforcing *cubanidad* became an obsession" as they looked for ways to cling to the past and maintain feelings of nationalism (Havana USA 90). In many cases, our parents dug in deep, waiting for their inevitable return to Cuba. Also, the enclave allowed many to live and work much as they did in Cuba. Those who arrived as older adults and those who had few English-language skills, typically lower middle-class and working-class Cubans, participated in the larger culture only minimally and then reluctantly, often with great difficulty. But the children of immigrants quickly become bilingual and bicultural.¹⁰ In school, they are forced to negotiate two distinct and often antithetical cultures. As I grew out of childhood, it grew more and more difficult to negotiate the two cultures, primarily at the level of gender role expectations.

¹⁰ By the time I started kindergarten, I was well aware that it was good to be Cuban, but it was better to be American. Before I was even in the first grade, I had changed my name to "Mary," no doubt at the prompting of my savvy older cousins, now "Kary" and "Lucy," instead of Karina and Lucia. My kindergarten diploma clearly reads "Mary Martinez," a name I was most pleased with, as I recall. My teacher, clearly outnumbered, almost hugged me when she discovered I could translate her English and our Spanish--and translate I did (for the next twenty years or so).

Having created a "replica of Old Havana" in America, Miami's exile community turned its attention to preventing "the emergence of a progressive movement that it believed was responsible for the revolution" (Monteagudo, "Miami, Florida" 780). As a result, the trappings of North American society then favored by the young - rock n' roll, long hair - was seen as communistic. I distinctly remember my father threatening to throw my teenage brother out of the house because he had let his hair grow down to the tips of his ears. Moreover, exiles established a culture rooted in acute homophobia, misogyny and racism--a climate that has proven violently repressive (Monteagudo, "Miami, Florida" 780). When I was a girl, my head-strong recklessness was largely tolerated. But as I began to approach puberty, it did not take me long to understand at some level that the world the exiles recreated in Miami, with its rigid gender role expectations and near-Victorian models of human sexuality, would be the death of me.

For us, the normal inter-generational conflicts all families experience became exacerbated by issues of acculturation, becoming an inter-generational cultural conflict of Cold War proportions (both sides armed to the teeth and unwilling to make even the slightest concession). Most teenagers are unintelligible to their parents and vice versa. But we stood there literally screaming at one other in different languages. (I had refused to speak Spanish for so long that I had nearly forgotten how to, and my parents speak almost no English.) Nothing in my parents' experience prepared them for a daughter who dressed like a boy, who wanted to date without a chaperone, who loved heavy metal the way a Charismatic Christian loves Jesus and who, horror of horrors, talked about going away to college. Certainly, nothing in their narratives allowed for the possibility of a girl who seemed not only sexual, but who seemed determined (in some ill-defined way) to remain in charge of her own body. And my parent's nostalgia, their experiences in rural,

pre-revolutionary Cuba did nothing to help us survive in a complicated urban Miami during the cocaine cowboy years. Our mothers would not let us date without chaperones. We helped our friends get abortions and learned to freebase. Our mothers talked of piano lessons. We tried not to get ourselves shot in the head like Rosa, a girl from one of the "best" old families in Santiago, not that it mattered anymore.

When I was fifteen or so--the year I should have had my *quince*s party--my father and I had a terrific fight, as I simply could not comport myself like a demure and dutiful daughter. He essentially called me a whore for some indiscretion, though I think I was technically still a virgin at the time. Something in me shifted its weight in my stomach, rose up along my jugulars and lurched at him. I watched myself pick up an enormous blood-red ceramic figure of a bull and throw it across the room at his head. It hit a door frame and shattered into a rain of blood-red ruby fragments that we were never able to gather up again.

Then came what I affectionately refer to as my "summer abroad" programs, Catholic school, military school, reform school. At eighteen, strung out and exhausted, I tried to become a "good" daughter by marrying a handsome, successful and severe man almost ten years my senior. My mother hoped he would be able to cure me of my wild streak and turn me into a respectable woman--a strange though not uncommon notion of reform. When I tried to leave my husband a few years later, when I finally admitted that my husband had beaten me senseless, someone suggested that I had, no doubt, deserved it.

Not even my books could help me. I had never read anything about Cuban American culture or gender roles or exile politics to help me understand my situation. (I had just read my first Wollstonecraft essay at community college, but I failed to make the

connection between the subjection of women and my situation). Even if I had had the insight to explore our literature for clues, all I would have found was a library full of first-generation exile poetry with its palm trees and sugarcane and vitriolic anti-revolutionary rhetoric to echo what I already knew--that I was an aberrant. Besides, I could hardly read Spanish.

Despite the fact that I checked books out of the local library by the dozen, I simply never found literature that offered me an alternative interpretation of the hyper-conservative exile community, no stories written from a bicultural perspective. I now know feminist writers like Lourdes Casal and Ileana Rivero began writing in the late 70s, but I never even knew their names until graduate school two decades later. Besides, by then I, too, had learned to defer reality--a citizen of "my own private Idaho," a place not unlike Havana, USA. Frankly, the 80s are a blur. I didn't re-surface until after the Reagan administration.

By the time I regained consciousness sometime around 1990, a small body of distinctly bicultural Cuban American literature had begun to surface. In 1991, I read Roberto Fernandez' Raining Backwards (Houston: Arte Público, 1989), a bizarre and beautiful book that satirizes the exile community's nostalgia and intransigence as dangerous to its children. (The daughter in the novel, Caridad, hangs herself from a ceiba tree.) I felt strangely validated. And I knew that I was not completely alone. When I read Cristina García's Dreaming in Cuban (New York: Knopf, 1992), I laughed out loud as I recognized myself in Pilar, a brazen, irreverent punk with deeply damaged, reactionary parents. García's novel gave me, for the first time, a place in the Cuban American national narrative as edgy and complicated as my own deranged life. The novel did not demand unthinking anti-communism or employ contrived fictions of *cubanidad*, but

offered resistant, feminist ways of thinking about cultural, generation and national identity.

Women's Places: National Identity and Cuban American Literature

When I was a girl, one of the foundational fictions which circulated in my family was the story of my great-great grandmother Exaltación, who according to my great grandmother Rosa, smuggled medicine, coffee and communiqués to the Mambís during the last war of independence in special pockets sewn into her skirts - a gamble which rested on invoking the "privilege" of modesty peculiar to white women of her class. Apparently, my great-great grandmother was not alone. In fact, Lynn Stoner, author of From the House to the Streets (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991) finds that the participation of relatively comfortable women in the war was not uncommon. They acted as messengers and spies precisely because espionage was not expected of them.

But why would a relatively privileged woman like my great-great grandmother risk her neck to provide for a rag-tag bunch of largely black insurgents so unlike herself in a war against the Spanish, from whom she was separated by a mere generation? Did she, as Anderson argues, resent the limits of her social position as a Creole? Did she see in the tyranny of her famously irascible father, the tyranny of the crown? Did she support the Mambís because she saw in the promise of a new nation the hope of escaping from under her the heavy hand of colonialism, her father, the church and tradition? Whatever her reasons, we do know that women used their considerable participation in the war as a platform to attempt to win the right to vote and establish other legal reform. In 1869, just one year after the beginning of the Ten Years War, Ana Betancourt addressed the Constitutional Congress--then in the process of selecting governing representatives and writing its principles of self-rule--to press for the inclusion of women's rights in those

foundational documents (From the House to the Streets 22). Betancourt specifically established parallels between the subordinate position of women and men of color, whose participation in the war was predicated on the promise of franchise. Though representatives at the congress acknowledged the heroic deeds of women during the war, the assembly refused to consider women's rights in the principles of the new nation. Rather, they argued, women would gain legal representation through their husbands.¹¹

In this study, I examine issues that rest, to a significant extent, on questions of national identity, including nineteenth-century Cuban nationalist sentiment and post-1959 Cuban exile nationalism. In recent years, critics have produced important theoretical texts on the nature and process of nationalism and modern nation-building--most notably Benedict Anderson. His text has inspired a great deal of scholarship. However, Anderson fails to address the gendered aspects of nation-building discourses in any significant scope. In Imagined Communities (New York: Verso, 1991) Anderson attends to the race/ethnic aspects of national incorporation, he hardly mentions the gendered aspects of nation building discourses, except to say, rather cryptically that one must "have" a nationality in the same way one must "have" a gender (5). As a result, feminist critics like Doris Sommer, Nira Yuval Davis and Anne McClintock have extended this theoretical work to offer feminist readings on the process of nation building.

In Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) Anne McClintock asserts: "If following Anderson, the invented nature of nationalism has recently found wide theoretical currency, the explorations of the gendering of the national imaginary remain

¹¹ Women did not secure the vote until 1934. But the right to control their own property, first established in the *maniguá* or guerilla camps during the war, was secured much sooner (From the House to the Streets 22).

paltry" ("No Longer in Future Heaven: Gender, Race and Nationalism" 89). Anne McClintock reworks Anderson to conclude that nations are "contested systems of cultural representation" that are at a basic, constitutive level, constructed in terms of gender difference. She adds: "All nationalism are gendered; all are invented and all are dangerous." Moreover, no nation, past or present, has granted women the same "access to rights and resources of the nation-state as men" ("No Longer in Future Heaven: Gender, Race and Nationalism" 89).

In the introduction to Nationalisms and Sexualities, Doris Sommer, Andrew Parker, Mary Russo and Patricia Yaeger also rework Anderson's contributions to examine gender difference. Anderson describes the nation as a form of "kinship" organization imagined as a "deep horizontal comradeship" (5,7). Sommer examines the ways in which that "deep, horizontal comradeship" extends to "libidinal economies." They conclude that the edict that one must "have" a nationality like one must "have" a gender implies that like gender, nationality is a relational term, defined against what it is not. In the same way that "man" is defined as "not woman," national identity is determined in terms of difference, that is, "not on the basis of its own intrinsic properties but as a function of what it (presumably) is not" (5). Sommer concludes that for this reason, nations are forever haunted by their others - a condition that accounts for the nation's need to police difference through various mechanisms, segregation, eugenic policies etc.

McClintock notes that the discourse of the modern nation-building period relies on the language of the heterosexual contract and the nuclear family. "Nations are frequently figured through the iconography of familial and domestic space" ("No Longer in Future Heaven" 89). Nation-building projects often employ the language of romance, marriage and maternity as a primary metaphor. Sommer adds: "it is no coincidence that

the rise of the modern nation-state coincides with the appearance of the bourgeois family" (Foundational Fictions 78).

Nations are also "symbolically figured as domestic genealogies" ("No Longer in Future Heaven" 91). Enlightenment ideals described the nation as an expanded model of the family; the metaphor was later extended to include eugenic notions of a hierarchical "family of man" in which certain "races" were seen as "naturally" child-like (and therefore, in need of governing). This "metaphoric depiction of social hierarchy as natural and familial . . . depended . . . on the prior naturalizing of the social subordination of women and children within the domestic sphere" ("No Longer in Future Heaven" 91). It is from these traditions of political thought and literary language that the "nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the West" (Sommer, Foundational Fictions 1).

In the Disorder of Women (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), Carol Pateman earlier argued that the modern social contract state is, at its very foundations a "fraternal pact that constitutes civil society as a patriarchal or masculine order" and that ascribes citizenship in highly unequal ways (33). Pateman examines the foundational texts of the modern state to determine that "sexual difference" is constructed as "political difference, the difference between men's natural freedom and women's natural subjection" (5). In this model, women's bodies represent the antithesis of "political order." And yet, nations are configured in terms of (re)productive female bodies; the nation-building projects simultaneously foreground women's bodies while excluding women from full participation in civil life.

McClintock notes, for instance, that during the French revolution, the Republic became figured in the image of a bare-breasted, young mother--Marianne. After the revolution, however, women were "incorporated . . . not directly as citizens but only

indirectly, through men, as dependant members of the family in private and public law." The Napoleonic Code became the first modern law to require that the nationality of a wife must follow after her husband's, a position other European nations, and I would add, Cuba, adopted. Thus, a "woman's political relation to the nation was . . . submerged as a social relation to a man through marriage" (McClintock, "No Longer in Future Heaven" 89, 91).

Early images of Marianne stress insurgent, revolutionary action. In Delacroix's 1830 painting "Liberty Leading the People," the barefoot, bare-breasted Marianne, bayonet in one hand, French flag in the other, leads the people as they storm the barricades. Her breasts, however, came to carry the most symbolic weight. Officially commemorated in 1848, Dubray's bust of Marianne features a bare breast with drops of breast milk, symbolizing maternal generosity and abundance. Honoré Daumier, too, the French caricaturist, painter and sculptor, depicted her with two muscular men suckling at her breasts.

As Malini Schueller notes in U.S. Orientalisms (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2001), early American icons, like Liberty and Columbia, though female, represented attributes traditionally associated with masculinity including "activity, power, athletic vigor, and a (virtuous) desire for expansion and control" (12). By the seventeenth century, Columbia, the feminization of Columbus, especially, already linked the idea of nation with "tropes of exploration and conquest" (11). In the years surrounding the American Revolution, Liberty and Columbia, like the French Marianne, are depicted wearing neoclassical tunics and the Phrygian cap of freed Greek slaves. Columbia and Liberty are typically represented holding a shield and sword aloft--erect, impenetrable and formidable figures. Schueller's attention to early American icons and her analysis of

empire as central to even early American national culture and literature prove especially useful, particularly as I see American intervention in Cuba as part of a pattern than began in the early 1800s.

But by the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, a period outside the scope of Schueller's study, Liberty is more often than not depicted in ways that serve to emphasize productive maternity and "domesticating" maternal care. By the early nineteenth century, the period of Westward expansion and internal colonization came to a close. American Indians had been decimated or contained on reservations. But by the late nineteenth century, if she appears with a sword at all, it is pointed politely downward - a figure of consolidation rather than conquest. As America turned its colonizing gaze outward beyond the continent to Hawaii, Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines, Liberty becomes increasingly associated with "dusky" children in need of care. She no longer stands erect, but often bends downward in comforting posture.

For instance, in one 1894 political cartoon entitled "Miss Liberty Calls Cuba," a buxom, sweet-faced North America bends at the waist and extends her arms to Cuba-- a small, brown, disheveled boy chained on the island just outside her reach. A blind-folded Uncle Sam sits stands near Miss Liberty, oblivious to Cuba's cries. In another cartoon of the same year, a placid and buxom Liberty fusses after a schoolyard full of unruly children, including several Chinamen, napping Mexicans, and a distressed pick-a-ninny who she holds by collar. A Canada in furs and a near-naked Hawaii (who looks like an Indian, complete with a single feather in a head-dress) are poised at the threshold of the school yard addressing Miss Liberty--who leans forward to hear them. The caption reads "Ma'am, May We Please Come In?" She is no longer a figure of military might, but a harried school mistress engaged in trying to domesticate her quarrelsome charges.

Stephanie Smith's Conceived by Liberty: Maternal Figures and Nineteenth-Century American Literature (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) also proves useful for my analyses of maternal figures in Cuban American literature. Smith finds that the icon of the mother is central to nineteenth-century American sentimental culture, but absent from the literature of the period. Her work helps me examine nationalist maternal figures, which can appear as a kind of pregnant absence in Cuban and Cuban American texts. Smith's study includes chapters on "Maternal Race," which examine the "fears of maternalized duplicity" exhibited in "works directly addressing slavery and racial conflict as threats to the Union" (26). These chapters prove particularly helpful in my understanding of nineteenth-century Cuban texts. And her chapters of "Paternal Return," in which she examines the "process of paternal reinstatement and the agony of maternal rejection" (27) evident in the work of Melville and Henry James, is useful to my examination of images of maternity/madness and masculinity/paternal authority in Cuban American literature, especially in the Elián Gonzalez case.

In the case of Cuba, nation-building cannot be discussed without addressing gender and race simultaneously in the figure of the maternal *mulata*. In fact, the Cuban wars of independence (1868 - 1878 and 1895 - 1898) were fought under the banner of La Caridad del Cobre, the Virgin of Charity. Her figure, rooted in "natural" and "sacred" categories of maternity, served as a unifying symbol of national identity for Cuban *independentistas*, many of whom otherwise had very little in common.

Representations of monstrous, sexualized *mulatas* also appear early and often in Cuban popular culture and literature. Indeed, the *mulata de rumbo* or "loose" *mulata* has, in various forms, dominated much of Cuban popular music, art and literature for almost three hundred years, persisting into the present. She is celebrated as the quintessentially

Cuban beauty; indeed, she came to represent Cuba itself. But the sexualized *mulata* in Cuban and Cuban American texts is also demonized as a dangerous, lascivious creature that snares white men who are, of course, helpless to resist her animalistic sensuality.

Criollo authors and statesmen engaged in nation-building projects justified a sense of separate-ness from Spain by claiming symbolic *mulatto* identity for Cuba. As Helen Safa writes, in Latin American and Caribbean countries, the "intermediate stratum," that is, people of mixed descent, often came to be "glorified as a national symbol," especially at the peak of national consolidation movements ("Introduction," Latin American Perspectives 4). Cuban elites claimed Cuba as *mulatto*, but they did so without having to completely surrender ideas about themselves as white or potentially white. As we will see in more detail later in this work, they did so by employing a discourse of *blanqueamiento*, or "whitening" that operated alongside ideas about *mulatez* to affirm race mixture, but maintain "white superiority" (Introduction, Latin American Perspectives 5). In this model, race mixture is not valued so much because blackness is valued, but because mixed-raced women are seen as engaged in the process of whitening the nation.

Latin-American elites shaped ideas about themselves over and against Spain. But they shaped ideas about themselves under and against the blade of North America. José Martí defended the "half-breed" national character of Latin-American nations, and he specifically imagined Cuba as a racial brotherhood. However, Martí's vision was complicated by the proximity of the pale and avaricious "Giant to the North." In the United States, Martí would find himself defending the honor of Cuban men from charges of effeminacy and racial/moral degeneracy for North American newspaper audiences. Schueller argues that Anglo-American "morality, industry . . . and masculinity" was set

against the "sensuality, despotism, moral flaccidity [and] and effeminacy of the Orient" (U.S. Orientalisms 4). I find that North American journalists and statesmen routinely referred to Cubans in terms not unlike those ascribed to sensuous "Orientals."¹² For instance, in 1898, the New York Evening Post reprinted excerpts from a Philadelphia Manufacturer article objecting to the prospect of admitting Cuba to the Union. "The men of Spanish birth . . . have ruled Cuba . . . with methods than combine tyranny and silly pride with fathomless corruption The native Cubans are not much more desirable. To the faults of the parent race they add effeminacy and a distaste for exertion that amounts really to disease . . . They are helpless, idle, of defective morals and unfitted by nature . . . to discharging the obligations of citizenship in a great and free republic . . . (March 21, 1898).

Tace Hedrick's work on José Martí in Mestizo Modernism: Race, Nation, and Identity in Latin American Culture, 1900-1940 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003) also proves useful here, especially her analysis of Martí's conflation of "romantic, anti-positivist, increasingly anti-United States and Americanist celebration of the organic richness of Latin American" with his "somewhat ambiguous" fascination with the modernity and the "effects of industry" (10). In the United States, Martí began to model a vision for Cuba, Puerto Rico and other emerging Latin-American nations that tempered the desire technological innovation with his idea of an organic brotherhood of "natural men" united in the love of the *mestiza* "Mother America." He imagined a Cuba that once free of the confines of colonialism, could look to modernizing trade, education

¹² Cubans themselves seem fascinated and repulsed by their own Moorish-Spanish inheritance. A dish of black beans served with white rice is often called *moros y cristianos* or Moors and Christians. And the eastern province of the island, cradle of every insurrection in the island's history, is called El Oriente.

and legal systems for the good of the republic and its people. But he continued to caution against North American annexation, as he had learned all-too-well the rapacious history of the United States and the scorn with which it dealt with its southern neighbors. As Hedrick notes, for Martí, the "Americanist project, one which had not yet attained freedom from Spain's colonial rule over Cuba and Puerto Rico, already had to look askance at the United States and its dreams of empire" (Mestizo Modernism 21).

The chapters in this work are organized around images and literary tropes that appear in Cuban and Cuban American literature over the last two centuries, namely the figure of the *mulata*, the *gallego/guajiro* and other white bodies (including the republican mother). In Chapter 2, "Mambisa y (Mala)madre: Mulatas in Cuban and Cuban American Literature," I begin with a study of *mulata* figures both sacred and profane, including Caridad, the decidedly brown-skinned patron saint of Cuba, and Celia Cruz, the Queen of Salsa. I also examine sexualized images of *mulatas*, including the most famous tragic *mulata* in Cuban literature, Cirilo Villaverde's Cecilia Valdes (first published in serial form 1839 and definitively in 1882).

Cecilia Valdes is located within a specific tradition of Latin American tragic *mulata* stories, which differ from U.S. tragic *mulata* narratives. In Cuban texts, the reader knows from the onset that the protagonist is mixed race; it is a given. The tragedy is enacted primarily when the *mulata* threatens the social order and creates marital discord. She is punished, dying in terrific pain--often by burning. In U.S. tragic *mulata* stories revolve around the hidden racial identity of the protagonist, who is "discovered," generally toward the end of the story. The very fact that the protagonist is a *mulata* is itself the tragedy.

For instance, in Hezekiah Hosmer's Adela, the Octoroon (Columbus: Follett, Foster, 1860) the protagonist--the much-loved and loyal daughter of a rich Carolina planter, is discovered to be the granddaughter of a *mulata* in the final chapters of the novel. On the death of her father, she is sold as part of the estate to a man who wishes to punish her for having rejected his proposal years before. The novel, set against the stirrings of the U.S. Civil War, the admission of the new Territories and the failed 1848 annexationist invasion of Cuba, interweaves several tragic *mulata* stories, a run-away slave narrative, a Liberian settler romance and congressional intrigues to an overall strange and troubling effect. Here, the figure of the *mulata*, who is "tragic" for reasons other than those that appear in similar Cuban stories, represents Cuba through a kind of metonymic displacement. The desire to own the beautiful octoroon Adela parallels passages in the novel in which southern slave states attempts to "possess" Cuba by whatever means necessary and a concomitant fear of racial degeneration or ambiguity in the body of the *mulata*. Indeed, while many U.S. Statesmen envisioned Cuba as a tempting and profitable "possession," others insisted that the racial character of its "indolent" inhabitants, its swarthy, tropical "effeminate" men made the island hardly fit for admission to the Union.

In "Mambisa y (Mala)madre," I also examine the work of Ricardo Pau-Llosa, a well-regarded contemporary author and art critic, particularly his collection entitled Cuba (Pittsburg: Carnegie Mellon, 1993). His work reveals that representations of sexualized *mulatas* continue to circulate in work by second-generation exile-identified Cuban American writers. Here, as in the past, the figure of the *mulata* functions specifically as marker of quintessential Cuban-ness. In fact, in several of his poems, the *mulata* becomes a kind of modern national monument with roots in the island's colonial past, like

Havana's cathedral. Indeed, her body acts as the bridge between colonial Cuba and modernity. She, herself, however, exists primarily beyond or outside history. In many poems, Pau-Llosa invokes the image sexualized, tragic *mulata* in deeply essentialist terms, even as he calls attention to the figure of the *mulata* as a literary construct.

In his analysis of Guillen's "mulatto madrigals," Pérez Firmat, too, concludes that the woman of color in Cuban literature is "significant" precisely because she is a "stereotype, a fictional being with that bears little resemblance to any flesh-and-blood woman." He theorizes on the relationship between representation and "reality" to claim that the figure of the woman of color in Cuban letters and popular culture is primarily a construct, an invention or literary trope with little connection to material women (The Cuban Condition 85). The much-mythologized figure of the *mulata* often obscures flesh-and-bone women of color and obscured the colonial legacy of rape. In other words, despite its long literary history, the symbolic figure of the *mulata* is also grounded in historical, material reality, that is, in material women with material, (re)productive bodies whose labors built the nation.

Even as an ideological construct, the figure of the *mulata* is specifically located in the island's "cultural, political and economic history" (Sugar's Secrets 4). Indeed, the Cuban nationalist discourse of *mulatez* is intertwined with the economic base of the island, that is, with sugar and tobacco - the island's primary agricultural products. The *mulata* is, herself, described in the language of sugar and tobacco. In fact, *mulata* women are often compared to grades of sugar, which becomes whiter as it is refined or to grades of tobacco, from the poorest and least desirable black *chicha* or filler to the finest high-yellow leaf, that is, *rubias* or blonds.

Her voice has only just begun to be recovered as a speaking subject. For instance, in The Agüero Sisters, García complicates the figure of the *mulata* in deeply materialist and resistant ways. Through the character of Reina, especially, García reclaims and reconfigures the *mulata*, much-abused in Cuban letters, to posit a complex exploration of Cuban and Cuban American identity. Reina is, in fact, easily the most interesting character in the novel – vigorous, capable, hedonistic, surprising and satisfying. Reina is intensely sexual. But she is no natural resource like sugar or tobacco. Reina's body, her sexuality and her reproductive abilities remain clearly her own, rather than a commodity controlled by men to serve a particular political economy. In Reina, García makes the *mulata* a figure of intense self-determination and woman-identified erotics. Pau-Llosa describes the *mulata* as a biological wonder. But through Reina, García re-invents *mulatez* as a deeply social process. Through the *mulata* Reina and her white sister Constanica, García examines Cuban identity as a set of multiple, racialized, competing, and acutely feminized representations and histories. In the novel's treatment of the sisters, García both destabilizes the two nationalist strands of Cuban identity --*criollismo* and *mulatez*-- which she renders indeterminate, but equal and, in fact, deeply inter-dependant.

In Chapter 3, "Golden Boys, Gallegos and Guajiros: Cuban American Identity as Criollo-White," I examine Cristina García's The Agüero Sisters (1997) and Mary Peabody Mann's Juanita: A Romance of Life in Real Cuba Fifty Years Ago (Boston: D. Lothrop Company, 1887) to analyze gender and white nationalist discourses, as they appear in Cuban American arts and letters. In both Mann and García, the historical and the political are manifested in and worked out through racialized familial relationships – both matrimonial and filial. Examining these two novels together allows me to trace gender, race and national identity in Cuban American texts specifically at the level of the

domestic and in the context of the North American presence in Cuba. Through these two novels, I find that gendered, often maternal metaphors serve shifting purposes – both ameliorating and intensifying American fears about the brown hordes to the south.

Mary Peabody Mann's abolitionist and annexationist novel Juanita was published in the United States during a renewed drive to annex Cuba. Based on the author's experiences as a governess in Cuba between 1833 and 1835, the novel largely expands on letters home to friends in New England. It belongs to a tradition of abolitionist texts which focus on slavery as morally indefensible based on the fact that it corrupts family life.

In early sections, the novel's narrative proposes annexation as a means of improving the island. In fact, Mann employs the use of American-educated *criollas* and North American women living in Cuba as providing the hope of "civilizing" the island through sound mothering and intercourse with liberal North American reform traditions. Juanita includes two white Cuban women educated in American boarding schools, Carolina Rodriguez, who returns to Cuba to marry and claim her sugar estate, and Isabella Rodriguez, who attended a Philadelphia finishing school as a girl with the pale, semi-invisible and ghostly narrator, Miss Helen Wentworth. This makes novel particularly useful for my purposes in that it reveals a nascent sense of Cuban national identity linked to American institutions and interests among *criollo* elites. In fact, the novel is populated by figures that glide easily between North and South, including Cuban elites and wealthy American expatriates.

Juanita interweaves the story of Carolina, Helen and the Isabella with several romances, including the story of two runaway slaves and a tragic *mulata* story centered on its title character. Both the blond, Boston-educated Carolina and the light-skinned

mulata Juanita become involved with Isabella's eldest son, Luvidico. Mann links Carolina and Juanita narratively to work through the intricacies of Luvidico's emerging Cuban Creole consciousness. Through this love triangle, Mann describes a kind of anxiety rooted in not only the necessity of defending an emerging Cuban Creole class over and against the African and the Spanish, but also under the American, that is, under annexationist pressures and concomitant claims about the racial inferiority of Cubans.

In 1898, ten years after the publication of Juanita, the Cuban War of Independence would end, as Martí had feared, with American intervention. American occupation forces openly doubted the ability of Cubans to govern themselves based on the island's racially "mongrel" population. Martí's racially inclusive vision of the new nation would be replaced by the vision of Cuba as a specifically white, modern nation that took its legitimacy from scientific racism and that found political support in the occupation government and the propertied classes.

The first years of American occupation coincided with immigration programs designed to whiten the island demographically by providing subsidized passage to largely poor white men from Spain, particularly Galicia and the Canary Islands. It is at this point in time that Cristina García's novel, The Agüero Sisters, begins, when Reinaldo Agüero arrives in Cuba, as his son Ignacio tells us, from Galicia with ten pesos in his pocket and a violin. Constancia reminds her *mulata* half-sister that "they" are descended from a *gallego*. This, she remarks with some seriousness and perhaps some cruelty is what makes them "true criollas" (12). (Ignacio is not Reina's father.)

The First Republic (1902 - 1933) was characterized by white nationalism. Cuban nationalist productions tended to rely on European-influenced forms in theatre, literature and music. Many nationalist texts avoided racial references altogether by invoking the

Cuban countryside and idealized gestures toward its white *guajiro* inhabitants--both of which function as a central elements in García's Agüero Sisters, from the first to the last page. Those characters most married to their European ancestry, Ignacio and Constancia, are often associated not only with the countryside, but with *guajiros* - white, rural inhabitants of Cuba's mountains and savannahs. (Mann describes *guajiros* as a distinct class of Cubans from which planters drew overseers, a clannish and bellicose lot.) Through Constancia and the *gallego* paternal line, that is, her father Ignacio and her grandfather Reinaldo, García interrogates the idea of Cuban identity as specifically white advanced during the First Republic (1902 - 1933).

Like Mann, García employs two women - one white, one *mulata* - to explore the meanings of Cuban identity shaped specifically in the context of the American presence on the island, in García's case after American occupation in 1898 and during the First Republic (1902 - 1933). Like Mann, she posits relationships between Cubans and North Americans as deeply troubling, but potentially profitable. Americans appear in Ignacio's life as both benevolently powerful, like Harvard professor of tropical biology he trains under, and dangerous, like the trigger-happy and unskilled tourists he guides on hunting expeditions through Cuba's forests. In fact, Ignacio witnesses American mechanization destroy the native flora and fauna of the island and his father's dignified way of life. (His father works as a lector in a cigar factory.)

Through Ignacio, the novel comments on the complex and conflicted relationship of Cuba and the United States during the First Republic. In fact, Ignacio is born under an omen that "predicts" its doom. The day that Ignacio is born, President Estrada Palma, a U.S.-educated former annexationist with American citizenship, is touring Pinar del Rio. As Igancio's mother delivers Ignacio, an owl plucks her placenta from the floor, flies out

the window and swoops low over the presidential parade "scattering the crowd and raining birthing blood" (29). The First Republic would be marked by corruption, half a dozen American military interventions, endemic unemployment and economic disaster. In 1933, growing resentment over American economic domination and political maneuvering on the island culminated in near civil war and the overthrow of Machado, a brutal, American supported dictator. García interweaves the Machadato with Ignacio's narrative.

Mann posits sound mothering and sisterly love as a remedy to colonial ills. García, too, employs a deeply matrifocal narrative in which an unexpected love between sisters provides a source of survival in the face of patriarchy and violence. The novel includes four generations of women – Constancia and Reina, their pale mother Blanca and their maternal *mulata* grandmother Eugenia, and their daughters, Isabel and Dulce, respectively. Their voices ultimately outweigh the paternalistic voice of Ignacio, rooted as it in murder and deceit. Through Constancia and Reina, García interrogates science, maternity, nation and history in feminist terms. García examines motherhood in complex ways – potentially disfiguring and disempowering, always violent. But she also posits generous, "unscientific" mothering as a potentially satisfying and meaningful alternative to the empty promise of nationalism and heroism.

In Chapter 4, "Malahembras y Maricones: Masculinity and Cuban American Literature," I examine the ways in which Cuban and Cuban American identity has, more often than not, been constructed in terms that foreground women's bodies while excluding women from the political realm. Cuba has, and continues to be, imagined in terms of reproductive women's bodies—as a mother. But Cuban and Cuban American national identity, both on and off the island, remains written as a matter of manly honor,

male heroism and male privilege. In Cuba, maternal figures like the Virgin of Charity and Mariana Grajales, the Mother of Cuba, have been used to express nationalist sentiment. But Cuba's central heroes of the independence movement were and continue to be, of course, men—like the great generals Máximo Gómez, Antonio Maceo, and, of course, the poet “apostle” José Martí, whose extensive writings were central to Cuban and, indeed, Latin American nation-building projects.

In this chapter, I examine the speeches, journalistic essays and letters of José Martí to explore his use of maternal images to invoke manly honor, including Martí's idea of “Mother America” and the figure of “natural man.” Martí employed images of aged mothers and suffering mothers to advance the cause of Cuban independence and to unify and mobilize Cuban revolutionaries. In speeches given in Tampa, New York and Key West, José Martí referred to the island itself as a mother being raped and crying out to its sons for aid. In fact, some of Martí's most passionate poems and essays on the Cuban struggle for independence employed images of women as mothers who suffered - a trope that he appealed to as evidence of the justness of the cause.

His writings, however, defined the Cuban nation in masculine terms - as a fraternity or brotherhood of black, white and mulatto men. For Martí, the souls of black men and white men, aristocrats and landless peasants became equal, rising as brothers from the carnage of bloody battlefields. Women participated in the wars in substantive ways, both in exile and on the island, where, in fact, they died, like all Cubans, in great numbers. However, the statues of the Cuban Revolutionary Party Martí founded do not incorporate women into the nation as citizens or active agents. Women represented the struggle, but the souls of women who suffered and died for the cause did not join the

souls of former slave men who earned their full humanity through their participation in the wars for independence.

José Martí centralized and organized the Cuban Revolutionary Party largely in exile in the United States—where a considerable exile population existed in New York, Philadelphia, New Orleans and Key West and Tampa. In fact, during the first war, nearly 10 percent of the Cuban population resided in the United States. After the 1959 Cuban Revolution, again, nearly 10 percent of the Cuban population arrived in the United States. The North American Cuban community of the nineteenth century, displaced by a colonial power and engaged in the task of gaining independence from Spain, was generally characterized by its liberal, populist nature, not only among its intellectuals and elites, but among its workers engaged in the cigar-making industry. In contrast, the post-1959 Cuban exile community in the United States, displaced by a socialist revolution, is characterized by conservative elements. Certainly, the first post-Castro wave (from 1959-1962) included a privileged set of disproportionately white upper and upper-middle class families. Journalists and writers of the post-1959 Cuban exile communities of Miami and Union City, New Jersey continue to symbolize Cuba as a woman and mother, but encoded *cubanidad* in terms of masculine agency and privilege.

Here I examine the texts and the work of Gustavo Pérez Firmat, a well-published, exile-identified Cuban American critic, poet, fiction writer and professor at Columbia University. His work, which includes essay, criticism, fiction and poetry, continues to configure Cuba as a mother—often fearsome and castrating. However, Pérez Firmat defines Cuban and Cuban American identity as a matter of unquestioned, hyper-heterosexual masculinity—in terms which literally require a penis.

In Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), Werner Sollors argues that in America, questions of identity include ideas of descent (defined by "substance" or blood and birth) and consent (those defined by contract, that is, marriage or law). In shedding Old World loyalties, Sollors argues, modern democratic nations code national identity as a matter of consent, employing metaphors of romantic love to naturalize "new forms of symbolic kinship among people who are not blood relatives" (7). Sollors' text, of course, is problematic. Clearly, some Americans are more "free" to "consent" than others. But Sollors' ideas on national identity as symbolic kinship, however, are interesting and valuable for my purposes. He relies on maternal and matrimonial metaphors to sort out ideas of Old World and North American identity, respectively.

Martí was engaged in a project to unite disparate groups, including Spanish-born *independistas*, under one national banner. But surprisingly, he tended to employ metaphors of marriage rather sparingly. Instead, he employed metaphors of maternity and filial duty, appealing to "blood" loyalty to legitimize the cause. He imagined the Spanish-born who joined the struggle not in terms of consent or contract, but as good fathers and therefore "natural" sons of Cuba. I would argue that he employed symbolic "blood" categories of maternity due to the difficulties of conceiving of a modern nation in the context of a colony that survived nearly until the twentieth century. Indeed, after independence, Cuban statesmen would find the archaic colonial code of law so at odds with the new constitution that it took many years of legal reform before modern democratic practices could be effectively be enacted.

Moreover, Martí was working to unite under the banner of the Cuban nation a population that included a significant black and mulatto sector, whose men had been

promised the elective franchise. In the United States, which achieved independence far earlier than Cuba, ideas of national citizenship applied only to white men of property - a racially homogenous group. Martí employed ideas of Cuban national identity rooted in "natural" categories of "blood" and maternity to help imagine black Cuban as part of the national "family," as brothers to Spanish-born men and white *criollos*. In a society where it was inconceivable to deny one's "blood" kin, perhaps natural categories of maternity and birth produced stronger associations of loyalty than those based on the more abstract symbols of contractual relationships. It is more difficult to turn one's back on a sibling, however hated, than an "in-law," however loved.

Gustavo Pérez Firmat, writing in the late twentieth century, employs ideas of marriage alongside those of maternal love to work out the complexities of Cuban American identity in the very pattern Sollor uses. In fact, Pérez Firmat describes his love for Cuba as the love one feels for a parent, and the love of the United States as akin to the love one feels for a spouse - a model that precisely coincides with Sollors' theoretical framework. I might argue, rather cynically, that the group Pérez Firmat has in mind as authentically Cuban, the early Cuban exile community in Miami, is disproportionately white--the formerly well-to-do sector of the island that consolidated its wealth and power emerged after independence, when blacks became marginalized once again. In fact, in many ways, the First Republic saw the intensification of racial divisions that existed under the colonial system, though black men did get the vote.¹³ Like the early founding

¹³ The literature of the First Republic is marked by ideas about the need to expunge not only the colonial Spanish influence, but the "taint" of Africa. The literature of the period helped to formulate a concept of nation that avowed white superiority by subsuming the category of race under the concept of nation.

fathers of the United States, Pérez Firmat's has no need to think of the Cuban nation as other than white.

In many ways, Gustavo Pérez Firmat's Next Year in Cuba: a Cubano's Coming-of-Age in America (New York: Anchor Books, 1995) and Life on the Hyphen: the Cuban American way (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994) are illustrative of the exile-imagined nation. Pérez Firmat, like many exile writers, locates the "real" Cuba in a grand past and a triumphant future – a future without Castro. He entertains notions of regaining his family's wealth and status, employing a disturbing sort of erasure that claims Cuba for "real" Cubans, that is, those elites who left after the revolution. Pérez Firmat's work articulates and defends the exile community's political agenda and its intractable anti-Castro position. In refusing to acknowledge the contemporary island, overrun as it is with black communists, and writing only from "memory," his work maintains a posture that widens the gulf between Cubans nationals and Cuban expatriates. He defines exile identity in rigid terms that ultimately prove limiting, reductive and potentially dangerous.

To a startling degree, Pérez Firmat participates in the acutely gendered dimensions of Cuban exile nationalism and politics, even as he constructs a complex sense of biculturated self in Cuba and in the U.S. The constellation of attitudes Pérez Firmat posits as characteristic of the Cuban American culture are gendered in specific terms - marked by rage and the loss of male privilege. Like Martí, Pérez Firmat employs the image of an old woman, his grandmother, as a durable symbol of Cuba. However, through his grandmother, Pérez Firmat is able to sidestep the revolution and ground his sense of *cubanidad* in a peasant Castilian past--a trope that mirrors nineteenth and twentieth-century Cuban white nationalist discourses of *criollismo*.

In my last chapter, "Bridge Bodies/Transnational Bodies," I will show that a small group of Cuban American writers have clearly begun to consider themselves ethnic Cuban American writers, rather than Cuban American exile writers. Their work rejects the calcified memories and Cold-War categories of identity that characterize exile-identified Cuban American cultural productions. Typically marked as "other" in terms of race, gender or politics and marginalized within the exile community, these authors move beyond borders and disrupt boundaries on many levels. These authors, like Cristina García, Achy Obejas, Ruth Behar, Eliana Rivero, Flavio Rísech, Coco Fusco and others have begun to look beyond nationality, making peace with the uncomfortable ambiguity of border-life. They find no easy answers, no triumphant reclamation of Cuba and privilege - so often imagined in Cuban and Cuban American exile texts. Like Cuban and Cuban American exile writers, they, too, look to the past to make sense of their history. However, ethnic Cuban American authors do not remain in the nostalgia narrative for long. In fact, they defy the exile lobby and return to the island in an effort to uncover the aspects of their personal history lost to the machinations of political and ideological forces. They re-write themselves and history, challenging dying and dangerous structures of thought. I refer to them collectively as "bridge" writers.

The work of bridge writers troubles and complicates the image of woman as silent symbol of the nation. They ask how Cuban women are to begin writing themselves into Cuban history. For instance, Ruth Behar, the editor of the innovative anthology Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1995), points out that in the rhetoric of both Cuban and Cuban American nationality "Manhood and nationhood [are] fused and confused." She wonders, in a phrase echoing Adrienne Rich, if "women don't have a country to lose"(12 - 13). Bridge writers have begun to attempt to locate

themselves in the national narrative, to situate themselves in history by actively challenging the unevenly gendered structures of nationalist discourse, particularly its fraternal foundational master narratives and fictions. In doing so, they engage in transgressive trans-nationalist projects full of possibility.

The work of Ruth Behar and most bridge writers has received considerably less space to publish or perform than their more conservative counterparts, perhaps because their work challenges the many illusions of exile. Unlike Los Atrevidos, who effectively ignore the island except in terms of nostalgia narratives or anti-Castro cant, bridge authors travel to Cuba--an unforgivable and dangerous transgression in exile Miami. Moreover, many engage in co-operative artistic ventures with Cuban nationals. They attempt to scale or dismantle the rigid ideological and geo-political walls that separate those Cubans on the island and those in exile. They take risks, both in their writing and in the flesh and have helped to herald in a new era of dialogue and perhaps even healing between Cubans on both sides of the Florida Straits. They have begun to walk away from the limiting and familiar landscape of Cold War politics, groping toward a dimly lit and hopeful place that requires a new language and that knows nothing of borders. On both sides of the Straits, our old mad blind despised and dying kings continue to grimace at one another, rattling their swords. But people on both sides of the Straits have begun to call for change in sane and moderate, if unpopular voices. They have begun to find ways to extend themselves across formidable ideological lines. Despite the years of bitterness between us, the lies, on both sides of the Straits, Cuban nationals and Cuban Americans have, against all logic, begun to discover and love one another.

For the record, my commitment to feminism and democratic socialism should not be confused with a pro-Castro position. While I admire the Castro government's official

agenda of social reform aimed at achieving racial and gender equality, as well as its program of universal health care and education, it would be naive to ignore the many reports of human rights violations on the island, the "re-education" camps of the previous decades, the *fusilamientos*, the imprisonment of intellectuals and artists charged with "ideological diversionism" (Havana USA 158). However, I am equally horrified by the exile community's vocal right-wing exile lobby—an similarly tyrannical set with a frightening political agenda, including tightening the embargo, which has done little more than deprive our families on the island of medicine and other necessities and help the Castro government convince *el pueblo* that *los yanquis* want to destroy them.

This text also approximates the work Cuban American writers in that I, too, indulge in a moment of nostalgia—looking to the past to make some sense of the wreckage of my life. However, I do not look behind me in order to reify the patriarchal values of a dead world—as Cuban and Cuban American exile writers do—but to challenge those who would write our histories for us. I look to the past, to my literal and literary foremothers, in an attempt to write the lives of those women who could not write it for themselves, as there were always children to chase and laundry to starch and piece-work quotas to be met. I have attempted to preserve the few remaining fragments of their narratives, finally writing down what has been passed down from mouth to mouth by harried women.

I also use Spanish in the dissertation – often without translation – to address the relationship between language and power evident in the work of the authors I examine. Cuban American writers, like other U.S. Latino groups, employ an intricate sort of code-switching—a linguistic act of loyalty, defense and defiance. This manuscript, like much of the literature of many minority groups, is written in a similar fashion, primarily in

English with Spanish "tag phrases" appearing through-out. It enacts the tradition of those who write from, for and about multilingual communities. American literature rightfully includes works written in dialects and vernaculars. It should include Spanglish, a "driven, fast-lane Spanish . . . that leaves other Spanish speakers amused and everyone else amazed" (Monteagudo 779). Any translations, unless otherwise noted, are mine.

Writing this has been, for me, an act of terror(ism). I often felt, in writing it, that I was betraying my family. I seethed. I sulked. I sobbed. I swore I'd never write another word again. I almost deleted the manuscript several times. I thought of abandoning the study, a death without weeping in the classic Caribbean style. (I've always said I would eat my young). Because this document exists, because I know what I know now, I can never pretend to "go home" again. In many ways, this document represents yet another gulf between me and the people I love. They will never read it, even if they could. In many ways, I did not write this document. I survived the writing of it. But now that it exists, I am wildly proud of it. And I am wildly grateful to those who talked me through the process and who helped me let it fight its way into the material world--to Tace Hedrick, a *compañera* in every sense of the word, and to Charles Sherwood Tennesen, who built me my own madwoman space in the attic so I could write in peace.

CHAPTER 2
MAMBISA Y MALAMADRE:
THE *MULATA* AND CUBAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

When Celia Cruz, the undisputed Queen of Salsa, died in 2003, an estimated 75,000 mourners stood in line for hours to pay their respects. In Miami, they braved as long as five hours in the brutal heat and humidity of a Florida summer to see "La Reina," a flamboyant octogenarian who lay very much in state under the vaulted ceilings of the Freedom Tower--the landmark building used in the 1960s to process Cuban exiles arriving in the United States. The public viewing on Saturday, July 19 was not only a wake--it was her last show. "She wanted all of her fans to be able to see her when she died," explains the singer's long time friend, Emilio Estefan (Fraser Delgado, par 2).

Irrepressible and outrageous even in death, Celia was buried wearing a blond wig of baroque dimensions. Death seemed to exaggerate her "mannish" features and barrel build. (Her deep, rich voice was once described as packing a *marimacha*, that is, a masculine punch.) Famously ugly, Celia looked as glorious and garish in her coffin as drag queen at a church picnic. Only her uncharacteristic stillness surprised anyone. (Celia was known for her frenetic energy.) But her *café con leche* skin somehow escaped the indignity of death to retain its usual warm, cinnamon tone. All in all, Celia seemed pleased. Her crazed, near-grotesque signature smile has been replaced by a hint of a sweet and satisfied grin, a detail that suggests those who prepared her body did so with much love and tenderness.

The viewing became a city event. County and City of Miami offices provided police patrols and closed off central streets, in downtown Miami, no less, to

accommodate the wake. But despite official city sponsorship, the *velorio* felt very much like a family affair. Celia's career spanned over fifty years, and so perhaps all those years of dancing to her music at *noche buenas* with drunk uncles has woven her into our memories with a certain affection. Every year, my uncles recalled that they had seen her singing out her heart in a Havana cabaret when she was a teenager. And every year, they declared: "She was ugly back then, too." At her funeral, her fans - largely white - spoke of losing not only an icon, but a beloved, dignified, if incongruously brown family member. Like the image of Caridad, the copper-skinned patron saint of the Cuban nation displayed at her funeral, Celia was every Cuban's mother.

For many, the *mulata* Celia represented Cuba itself - a practice with a long history in Cuban arts in letters. Havana-born journalist Carlos Alberto Montaner, an exile writer, noted of her passing: "If the brotherly idea of Cuba was a smiling mix of rum, *mulata*, song and dance, Celia was all this" ("La negra tuvo tumb'ao," par. 1). Indeed, the *mulata* has served as perhaps the most central symbol of Cuban identity, particularly the Caridad, the Virgin of Charity. But her cult did not fully emerge until the late nineteenth century.

In contrast, decidedly non-virginal *mulatas* appeared much earlier, ostensibly beginning with late seventeenth century music. By the early nineteenth century, the highly sexualized *mulata de rumbo* appeared as a consistent archetype in Cuban popular culture, celebrated as a quintessentially Cuban beauty and demonized as animalistic and licentious. In the 1830s, the tragic, sexualized *mulata* appeared in popular music, specifically *guarachas*, in *teatro vernáculo* and *costumbrista* music, art and writing. Early nineteenth-century literary texts centered on the *mulata* include the works of a great many largely white men, including Cililo Villaverde's novel, *Cecilia Valdés* (first

published in serial form in 1837), the poems of Francisco Muñoz del Monte, Bartomolé José Crespo and Plácido, a mulatto poet executed during the Escalera Conspiracy in 1844. Late nineteenth-century literary works include Martín Morúa Delgado's *Sofía* and Ramón Mesa's *Carmela*. Early twentieth century texts centered on the sexualized *mulata* are so numerous that Vera Kutzinski argues it is tempting to term the work of the period *mulata* literature rather than *negrista* literature (*Sugar's Secrets* 163 - 164).

By the mid-nineteenth century, *cubanidad* had begun to be associated with *mulatez*. In fact, Celia's funeral made visible a set of beliefs and practices that define Cuban identity as specifically mixed race. As the Cuban *dicho* reminds us: "*El que no tiene de Kongó, tiene de Carabali*." The phrase roughly translates to mean that all Cubans have African ancestry. However, ideas of *mulatez* operate alongside discourses of *blanqueamiento*, that is, cultural and biological whitening, progress and order. "*Juntos, pero no revueltos*," another popular *dicho* cautions, which means "together but not mixed together."

In this chapter I examine the ways in which "Cuba" has been imagined in terms of the sacred maternal *mulata*, primarily the Virgin of Charity. I also examine monstrous sexualized images of the tragic *mulata* and the *mulata de rumbo*, including Cirilo Villaverde's nineteenth century novel, *Cecilia Valdés*. The force of *mulata* images has not lost its ideological potency in post-revolutionary Cuba or in exile Miami, where the cult of the *mulata* is alive and well in even recent Cuban American literature--particularly the masculinist coming-of-age stories which dominate the field.

Here I examine the work of Ricardo Pau-Llosa, a well-published poet, art critic and curator active in Miami literary circles. Pau-Llosa invokes the *mulata* as an icon of Cuban national identity. At times, he invokes the maternal and matronly *mulata* as the

morally upright steward of respectability, rather like Celia and Caridad. But more often than not, Pau-Llosa depicts the *mulata* as sexualized and tragic in troubling, essentialist ways, even as he calls attention to the figure of the *mulata* as a literary construct. In his work, the tragic, sexual *mulata*, too, serves as a kind of national monument with roots in the island's colonial past, like Havana's cathedral. She acts as the bridge between colonial Cuba and modernity, but exists beyond or outside history and functions to encode *cubanía* as a matter of white, hyper-heterosexual masculine privilege. In Pau-Llosa's texts, as elsewhere in Cuban literature, the *mulata* is endlessly spoken of but rarely a speaking subject. Like other women, she is "at once captive and absent in discourse . . . displayed as a spectacle," but still unknowable (Teresa De Lauretis qtd. in Sugar's Secrets 164).

A few Cuban American writers, most notably Cristina García, have begun to reclaim and re-fashion the literary figure of the *mulata* as a deeply resistant speaking subject. García's work has re-written the tropes of the *mulata* to create complex, satisfying and evocative narratives that call attention to the social construction of race and gender and that challenge masculinist notions of history and the very idea of the nation.

Cuban Color

Miami resembles Cuba/ but without. . ./the smell of sugarcane juice . . ./
It's missing, I don't know what/ the most delicious things./ Even Olga Guillot has
changed/ and in the depth of her sensuality/ there is a courseness, a timid sob./
Celia Cruz looks like/ Celia Cruz . . . -- Pura del Prado's "An Exile's Monologue"

At Celia's funeral, Representative Lincoln Díaz-Balart praised Celia as "the maximum symbol of the Cuban race." But he also described her as having no race at all, employing the words of nineteenth-century Cuban statesman and poet, José Martí, to do

so. Diaz-Balart told a Telemundo news reporter: "In Cuba, for Cubans, there can't be whites or blacks" (Fraser Delagado, par. 6).

The phrase, so well-known, apparently, that Diaz-Balart did not need to acknowledge it as José Martí's words, comes from "My Race" written during the late nineteenth century, at the height of the Cuban independence movement. In "My Race," too, Martí specifically defended the *mestizo* or *mulatto*¹ nature of Latin American nations, declaring that racism was a "sin against humanity" (José Martí Reader 160) In the late 1800s, the years that saw the development of scientific racism in the United States, Europe and Latin America, Martí, questioned not only the innate inferiority of blacks, but the validity of "race" itself, writing, "there are no races . . . The soul, equal and eternal, emanates from bodies of different shapes and colors" ("Our America," José Martí Reader 119). Martí specifically imagined Cuba as a racial brotherhood, and it was in the context of arguing for the inclusion of black and mulatto men in the new nation, that Martí wrote the famous phrase Diaz Balart employed at Celia's *velorio*.

But Diaz-Balart, not unlike Martí's contemporaries, employed Martí's idealistic idea that there were no black or whites, only Cubans, to advance the myth of racial harmony in Cuban society--a claim history does not support. Martí's did not survive the 1895 war. After independence, his idealistic words would come to serve the interests of the propertied classes and the American occupation government, which hoped to create a

¹ The discourse of *mulatez*, a "visionary faith" in the in the political and social viability of increasingly hybridized populations," prescribed cross-racial breeding as the "antidote to barbarism" and the means to creating modern Latin American nation-states. It would be complicated in the late 19th century, when Latin American and Caribbean narratives of racial mixing became increasingly rooted in modified Darwinian models, particularly as advanced by neo-Lamarckian French intellectuals. Here miscegenation was equated with "degeneration" (Martínez-Echazabal, "Mestizaje and the Discourse of National/Cultural Identity" 30).

modern nation that was both culturally and demographically white. The language of the "apostle," a martyr-hero of mythic proportions, was used to dismiss attempts to secure a legitimate place for blacks in the nation by declaring discussions of racism and racial equality divisive or unpatriotic.²

Diaz-Balart employed Marti's words to obviate race by subsuming it under exile national identity - in effect, whitening Celia. Miami Mayor Alex Penelas, on the other hand, claimed that Celia was both Cuban and black. His obvious attempt to court the black Miami vote, however, met with surprise on the part of Cubans and little response from Miami blacks, for whom any "connection with Celia Cruz is distant at best" (Fraser Delgado, par. 18). In fact, in Miami, the black community often finds itself overshadowing and vilified by the largely white, conservative, and increasingly affluent Cuban exile population. One black man, an unemployed resident of Overtown, one of Miami's poorest downtown black neighborhoods, paused to watch the funeral procession pass near North Miami Avenue. He asked who Celia Cruz was (Fraser Delgado, par. 18). Another man remarked with amazement. "To see white Cubans do this for people of color is incredible . . . White Americans don't do this for black people"(Fraser Delgado, par. 19).

By the U.S. standards, where rules of hypo-descent continue to operate, Celia was certainly black. Historically, the "one-drop" rule has designated mixed-raced individuals, however light, as black, a practice designed to nullify the threat of racial ambiguity.

² See Fuente Alejandro de la Fuente's A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001) and Aline Helg's, Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995) for an excellent analysis of the post-independence exclusion of blacks from political participation, culminating in the race massacre of 1912.

Today, rules of hypo-descent continue to designate mix-raced individuals as belonging to the subordinate category. As late as 1983, a court in Louisiana, for instance, upheld a 1970 state law that declared anyone with even one-thirty-second "Negro blood" to be black (Omi and Winant, Racial Formation, par 1).

But by Latin American standards, Celia was a *mulata*, albeit "*tirando a morena*." In Cuba, as elsewhere in the Hispano-phone Caribbean and Latin America, definitions of race are generally rooted in phenotype rather than genotype and include a considerable mixed-race category. In fact, the mixed-race category is divided into a good number of relatively fluid groups based on phenotypical features, including *blanconazos* (white enough to "pass"), *adelantados* (light-skinned with Caucasian features), *jaba'os* (light skin with African features), *trigueños*, (light skin with "good" hair), *pardos*, and *mulatos chinos*. The recognition of multiple "hybrid" categories of race and definitions of race rooted in phenotype allow for a measure of ambiguity, making race potentially more fluid than those based on rules of hypo-descent and rooted in genotype. Certainly, race becomes more open to class factors.

Celia was not particularly light-skinned, certainly not a *mulata blanconaza*, the equivalent of the North American "high-yellow" *mulata*. And she had some stereotypically African facial features. In fact, she was probably perceived by many as a *parda*, rather on the darker end of the mixed-race spectrum. But she was also a celebrity with vast sums of money. And money whitens. Everywhere.

Certainly, Celia did not deny her blackness. According to Celeste Fraser Delgado, a music writer for the *Miami New Times*, Celia "always preserved the African culture in her music, from the early Sonora hit 'Yerbero Moderno' to the Fania classics 'Quimbara' and 'Bemba Colorá' to 'La Negra Tiene Tumbao.' Even her signature exclamation,

'Azucar!' refers in a broader sense to the backbreaking labor of harvesting sugar cane on Cuban plantations" (Par. 19). However, for much of her career, Celia incorporated highly stylized Afro-Cuban themes into her music, that is, safely contained in the context of material meant for commercial distribution and for largely white audiences. (The groundwork for the acceptance of Afro-Cuban music in mainstream commercial markets was established in the 1930s and 40s, when Ernesto Lecuona, Pérez Prado and others popularized the use of stylized Afro-Cuban motifs in commercial music in Cuba, the United States and Europe.)

But Celia also enacted working-class, ritual forms of Afro-Cuban *orisha* worship or *santería*³ through her music, that is, the drums of black "devils" said to kidnap white children and eat human flesh. She did so primarily in the last decades of her career, after she was established as an icon herself - a model of respectability. Matronly rather than overtly sexual, married to the same man for forty years and beyond reproach morally or politically, she smiled wildly, but did not threaten.

The same can not be said for her only "rival," a voluptuous, scandal-prone, Santiago-born *mulata* known as La Lupe. She was notorious for her deranged performances, during which she was given to barking, howling, attacking her musicians, throwing her wig and jewelry at the audience, and occasionally tearing her off her clothes, most famously during a live television broadcast. Many said she became

³ *Santería*, a syncretic religion combining West African *orisha* worship with Catholicism, is often deemed barbaric and dangerous. Historically, *santeros* have been persecuted in Cuba, their drums and ritual objects destroyed. But *santería* continues to permeate Cuban society, surviving in the subtext of Cuban language, art, literature, and music. Moreover, it has actually influenced and changed the dominant Cuban culture. Even white, middle-class Cubans tend to practice Catholicism in African-inflected ways, lighting cigars to San Lázaro or offering honey to the Virgin of Charity, often without any thought to their practices as anything other than Roman Catholic.

possessed by the devil on stage, an idea she played on. One of her album's, for instance, was titled "con El Diablo en el Cuerpo" which means with the devil in the body. (Celia, on the other hand, was quick to publicly praise god for her abilities and her good fortune and stressed the benevolent aspects of *santería* in her music.) I would argue that La Lupe's maniacal theatrics employed elements of *santería* alongside elements of "camp" to destabilize representations of the *mulata* as sexually degenerate and/or insane. Together, Celia and La Lupe enact twin halves of the *mulata* icon - the sacred and maternal *mulata* including the Virgin of Charity, and her monstrous, sexualized double, the *mulata de rumbo* and/or Ochún.

Celia was able to enact elements of *santería* without the associations of "devil worship" typically attributed to it. *Santería*, once criminalized,⁴ has been used by marginalized groups to encode a sense of resistant identity. But as Celia's career reveals, it can also appear in commercial, mainstream settings with little sense of threat or danger, "domesticated" or emptied of its potential force. Similarly, the figure of the Virgin of Charity/Ochún has functioned as both a resistant icon, and an icon that functions in the interests of elites.

La Reina, La Virgen y La Loca

Celia Cruz and Guadalupe Victoria Yolí (La Lupe) were born in Cuba around the same time, La Lupe in Santiago and Celia in Havana. (La Lupe was a little younger.)

⁴ *Santería* is a complex system of worship, healing and divination that stresses harmony with the natural world, with one's family and ancestor spirits and the gods. But it is often conflated with *Palo mayombé*, a sect that does employ "spells" meant to harm and with *Nañingo* "brotherhoods," or secret societies that tended to war on one another. All forms of *orisha* worship were criminalized in Cuba beginning in the colonial period and again during the white nationalist First Republic. In the 1910s, anthropologists like Fernando Ortiz made the first attempts to study Afro-Cuban religion, initially in an attempt to eradicate it. In later years, Ortiz, like Lydia Cabrera, became convinced of its value and its centrality to Cuban culture.

Both had fathers who opposed the idea of a singing career. Both studied to be teachers. Both began by winning singing contests on the radio - Celia with her father's permission, La Lupe by skipping school and walking many miles barefoot to the radio station. Both became stars in Havana, Celia at La Tropicana and La Lupe at the notorious La Red night club, where, as later in New York, she had a considerable gay following. (La Lupe first performed on stage in Havana at El Roco with the trio Los Tropicales, which she joined while still working as a schoolteacher. She was later thrown out of the group for her undisciplined behavior.) Both Celia and La Lupe invoked *santería*. La Lupe became an initiate, a prolonged and difficult undertaking. Celia professed to be a practicing Roman Catholic, but her knowledge of *toques de santos*, which can take years to learn, suggests that she had more than a passing acquaintance with the religion.

Stories about La Lupe's early musical talents center on her head-strong defiance of her father, who first heard her sing by accident when he heard her on the radio. In contrast, Celia's early musical talent is often described as direct gift from god, typically in a context that stresses domesticity and maternal affection. In an oft-repeated account,⁵ Celia's family "discovered" her gift for singing when Celia, who was required to put the younger children in the house to bed, sang them lullabies--attracting the attention of neighbors and passersby.

As with Lupe, Celia's parents wanted her to enter a respectable profession, like teaching. "I wanted to be a mother, a teacher, and a housewife," Cruz recalled in a New

⁵ Another less-repeated account claims that she earned her first "salary" at the age of 6 when a tourist bought Celia her first pair of shoes in exchange for a song. The story hints at the dire circumstances of the Cruz family. However, this anecdote, too, is typically interpreted as a sign of Celia's gift. After that, her mother knew that "this was a special child" (Salsadance Biographies, par. 3).

York Times interview. And Celia did begin training to become a teacher. But she also began singing in talent contests and on the radio because she desperately needed the money to buy school books. (Celia grew up in a poor neighborhood of Havana, Santo Suarez, in a home that included 14 children - three siblings and ten cousins, nieces and nephews.)

Celia often recounted that her father, Simon Cruz, was utterly opposed to singing professionally because he was sure it would "disgrace" her and dishonor the family. Indeed, Havana during the Batista years was rife with peep shows and live sex shows, and its many casinos and nightclubs were centers of organized crime activities, including prostitution. But a respected teacher helped her mother convince her father to let Celia leave Normal School for a conservatory. (La Lupe actually finished her training at Normal School.) According to a press release for the Congressional Gold Medal website: "She worked hard, and whenever she traveled to performances, a female relative accompanied her as a chaperone" (Par. 15). Like other publicity about Celia, the website stresses her respectability and that of her family, distancing her from charges of sexual availability often leveled at women of color, particularly nightclub performers.

Celia first recorded in 1947, when she performed invocations to "Babalú Ayé" and "Changó" with a group of practicing *santería* initiates on a collection entitled Santero, today considered the first example of sacred Afro-Cuban rhythms recorded in a studio.⁶ (A distributor for the label, clearly alarmed, claimed that the group refused to perform unless they were allowed to perform cleansing rituals in the studio space first.) Two years later, she was hired to sing traditional Yoruba songs on a radio program that showcased

⁶ Santero was recorded for a small label known as Panart, the first Cuban record label (founded in 1943 by Ramon S. Sabat).

Afro-Cuban music. She also began singing in nightclubs with the troupe Las Mulatas de Fuego.

In 1950, she was hired as the lead singer for La Sonora Matancera, Cuba's most popular orchestra and headlined at Havana's world-famous Tropicana nightclub and casino. She released her first major commercial recording with the La Sonora Matancera, a 78 rpm single released in January 1951, with the *pregón* "Mani Pica'o" on one side and "Mata Siguaraya," a kind of herbal spell remover, on the other. With La Sonora Matancera, Celia produced music with highly stylized Afro-Cuban elements meant for commercial audiences rather than the ritual underclass Afro-Cuban music of her early career. In July 1961, Celia was finally able to dispense with her chaperone when she married long-time friend Pedro Knight, the trumpeter for La Sonora Matancera. Later that year, the group arrived in the New York, and she began recording extensively.

La Lupe also arrived in New York in the first years after the revolution. In 1963, she recorded with the legendary Latin-Jazz artist, Mongo Santamaría. The album, Mongo Santamaría Introduces La Lupe, sold well and established her as a star in the U.S. In 1964, La Lupe debuted with Tito Puente, producing five albums with him in the next few years. During the 1960s and 1970s, La Lupe produced some thirty albums in the United States. They sold in the millions.

At the height of her career, Tito Puente, apparently tired of the singer's theatrics and chaffing at her demands for star billing, dropped La Lupe in favor of the less troublesome Celia Cruz. La Lupe's life began to unravel. Yet another husband divorced her. She lost her children and became partially paralyzed by a fall. She became intermittently homeless for years and died in her early fifties, a pauper. ("La Lupe," par 5). With her smoky voice, torrid love affairs and extravagant tastes, she is sometimes

compared to Billy Holiday, particularly as there are rumors that La Lupe was addicted to heroin.

From 1965 to 1972, the years that La Lupe's star was fading, Celia recorded dozens of albums, including seven in partnership with Tito Puente. Every album she produced during that period incorporated stylized Afro-Cuban motifs, like her 1968 album La Excitante, which includes "Negra Caridad." (Those she produced with Tito Puente, however, do not.)

For most of her career, Celia performed music with stylized Afro-Cuban themes. However, in 1994, Celia released Homenaje a los Santos, an album that includes traditional *toques de santos* not unlike those she recording in 1947, rather than the stylized forms she had come to be known for. Homenaje a los santos includes "Yemayá," "Óyeme Aggayú," "Oyá, Diosa y Fe," "Changó Táveni," and "Saludo a Eleguá," among others.

In these later years, Celia managed to find a cultural space in which to affirm the underclass forms of Afro-Cuban culture – even in its *toques de santos*. In fact, as Celia grew older, her performances began to include frenetic dancing and movements associated with *orisha* possession or "mounting." Footage of her early performances show her standing relatively still, swaying her hips ever so slightly under a full skirt. But in late 70s and 80s, perhaps as she became more secure in her success, she gyrated and shook and shimmied, clearly enjoying herself, typically for the entire duration of three-hour concerts. La Lupe's ferocious dancing was seen as a kind of demonic possession. Celia's frenetic dancing, however, was seen as a gift from more benevolent *santos* who seemed to work through her, especially on stage.

Mother of God

*In the beginning there were chains/entwined on legs like serpents on sugar cane/
Those with one foot chiseled on the island/the other strutting Yoruba, Arará/
daughters of Ochún/They pitched projectiles of words/You see/There were no
books around/& what would a victim/do with the murder weapon anyway*

-- Adrian Castro, "In the Beginning"

The figure of the Virgin of Charity, the *mulata* Caridad, with her distinctly Indian and African elements, initially represented the subordinate sectors of a colonial slave society. In the seventeenth century, her emblem helped the slaves of El Cobre forge a resistant community grounded in material rights - in the face of a colonial power and the Catholic Church that supported it. During the last War of Independence (1895 - 1898), the image of Caridad helped guerilla fighters, who proudly called themselves *Mambis*, itself a Congolese word meaning "the wretched," defeat a brutal colonial army with superior numbers and resources. But her image also helped convince a largely black population to fight a protracted and devastating war on behalf of their former owners. Indeed, after Independence, people of color would find that actually claiming their rights as Cuba citizens was an entirely different matter from dying for its cause.

Like Mexico's Virgin of Guadalupe,⁷ La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, or Cachita, as she is affectionately known, appeared to subalterns, a young slave and two Indian brothers. She is described specifically as a *mulata* - a brown-skinned virgin with

⁷ In 1531, barely ten years after the Spanish Conquest of Tenochtitlan, Our Lady of Guadalupe, with her decidedly brown skin, appeared to the Indian Juan Diego and addressed him in Nahuatl. More over, she appeared to him on the hill of Tepeyec, the site of worship to an important pre-Colombian fertility goddess, Tonantzin. Devotion to Guadalupe became syncretized with the worship of the Aztec goddess. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, priests lamented that villagers and pilgrims continued to refer to the Our Lady as Tonantzin. Fray Jacinto de la Serna, for instance, noted: "It is the purpose of the wicked to worship the goddess and not the Most Holy Virgin, or both together" (Brother John M. Samaha, S.M., International Marian Research Institute).

distinctly New World elements. According to the 1687 testimony of Juan Moreno, he and two Indian brothers, Rodrigo and Juan de Hoyos, had set out to in a small boat in 1611 or 1612 when a storm began. The Virgin appeared to them and interceded, sparing their lives. When the storm abated, they found a statue floating on a tablet, inscribed with the words, "I am the Virgin of Charity."

The Virgin then appeared to a young girl named Apolonia in the mining village of El Cobre, with instructions to have her statue taken there. Her statue was placed in a small shrine in the hospital for the slaves who worked the mines - a small room located adjacent to the church. By 1640, La Caridad was moved to the main altar of the church, where she been the focus of worship since. The figure of La Caridad at El Cobre helped the community gain material rights. Indeed, beginning in 1650, El Cobre would become the site of a highly unusual slave "revolt" and the birth of the first community of free Africans in Cuba.⁸ By the early 1700s, Caridad had become popular throughout el Oriente, becoming a kind of regional patron saint (Tweed, *Our Lady of Exile* 20 - 23).

As with the Virgin of Guadalupe, the early worship of Caridad at El Cobre was likely a syncretic form, with Caridad associated with Ochún, her "dark" West African double. In an early counter-narrative to the Christian story of *los tres Juanes*, Caridad/Ochún arrived in the New World from Africa specifically to help her children survive the Middle Passage and slavery, becoming the patron saint of all Cubans by adopting a *mulata* appearance. In the non-Western oral text, Ochún, distressed that so many of her children were being enslaved and taken to a far off place called Cuba, asked her sister Yemayá, goddess of the seas, to stop the forced removal. But Yemayá could

⁸ See Maria Elena Diaz' *The Virgin, the King, and the Royal Slaves of El Cobre: Negotiating Freedom in Colonial Cuba 1670-1780*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

not. So Ochún, in her deep love for her children, decided to follow them to Cuba. She asked Yemayá what Cuba was like, and Yemayá replied that it was much like Africa, but that not everyone was black. Ochún then asked her sister to give her straighter hair and lighter skin so she could be the mother of all Cubans (Tweed 49). Here the emphasis is on the Middle Passage, slavery, resistance and survival. The Christian narrative primarily gained salience as a story associated with independence movements in the late nineteenth century (Tweed 49). The West African oral text has been largely ignored, though one young, U.S. born Cuban-Dominican writer, Adrian Castro, resurrects the oral text. In his poem, "In the Beginning," Castro invokes Ochún, rather than Caridad as the primary, originating figure, the "mother of a new people." He mutes the Christian narrative by privileging the West African oral text.

Caridad did not become synonymous with nation until the late nineteenth-century War of Independence (1895 - 1898). Her banner was often taken into battle and worn on uniforms in the form of scapulars. Rebel soldiers, including Antonio Maceo, Maximo Gomez and Calixto García, paid homage to her at El Cobre before departing for battle (Tweed 23). During the War of Independence, the bronze Virgin of Charity seemed to reflect the purportedly racially inclusive nature of the revolution and the promise of incorporation for black Cubans in the new nation. She helped unify Cubans of varying classes, regions and colors, mobilizing a highly heterogeneous population under one functional, maternal emblem and gave the *Mambís* a powerful claim to independence in clearly biological terms - terms rooted in "natural" and "sacred" categories of maternity. She at once invokes "difference" or separation from Spain and provides claims to "origin" or a specifically Cuban history.

Afro-Cuban participation proved decisive to winning independence. But after the war and the American occupation, black Cubans would find themselves excluded from important military and government post and marginalized through violence meant to "terrify blacks and keep them out of political power." The early republic also coincided with efforts to "de-Africanize" Cuban culture, including the intensified criminalization of Afro-Cuban religion (Moore 32 - 33).

During the first decade of the new republic - the years marked by intense repression of Afro-Cuban religious forms - veterans appealed to Pope Benedict the XV for the recognition of the Virgen Mambisa. In 1916, five years after the race massacre of 1912, Caridad became the official patron saint of the island. Today, images widely circulated of the Virgin of Charity in Miami depict her floating over the ocean, with the three fishermen in their little boat at her feet. The two Indian brothers, Rodrigo and Juan de Hoyos, are depicted as adult and decidedly white - with light hair and full beards. The boy Juan Moreno kneels in the center of the boat with his hands folded in supplication to the Virgin - a passive and diminutive figure. The two white adult fishermen are bent with strong wide backs over oars, furiously rowing the skiff - active and manly with their beards and broad backs. Collectively, the three fishermen are now referred to as the generic *los tres Juanes*. The Virgin's dark face has become rather pale, with conspicuously red apple cheeks. Her extravagant, shimmering yellow raiment, suggestive of copper, has been replaced by a muted blue and white mantilla. Her long black hair is covered, and the baby Jesus in her arms is no longer dark, but nearly blond, as are the cherubs that flank her.

The figure of the Virgin of Charity followed Cuban exiles to Miami, Union City and other enclaves in the U.S. In Miami, the Cuban community adopted Caridad as the

patron of the "nation in exile" and the future liberator of the "nation in chains." In fact, in 1961, a copy of the virgin's statue long-held in a Havana parish was smuggled in a suitcase to Miami, where she arrived on her feast day, September 8. She was met with jubilation and carried in a procession to the pedestal in the chapel built to her in Coconut Grove (Tweed 15). La Ermita de la Caridad sits at the edge of Key Biscayne Bay, facing, of course, Cuba. The shrine is built in the triangular, mantle shape of the Virgin herself. The faithful meet, literally, under her virgin's skirts to "orient" themselves in time and space--an act of "geopieté" which "transports" them to a Cuba of "memory and desire" (Tweed 35).

Inside, a mural behind the main altar depicts a peculiar vision of Cuban history. The Virgin's figure in the center of the mural acts to unify images of a few long-dead Taíno Indians, numerous Spanish missionaries and famous Cuban *criollo* heroes, constructing a sense of "continuous" Cuban-exile history and providing a sense of timelessness to the exile community. The dozens of figures depicted in the mural are almost entirely male. Only two tiny figures, one apparently Apolonia, and another a faceless mother, are women.

The shrine to the Virgin of Charity combines spatial and visual narratives to create a sense of history that legitimates the exile community and its sense of itself as the "legitimate" Cuba. The shrine, like the realist novel, employs a set of textual moves to create a sense of unity and continuity. Indeed, the shrine, especially its mural, depict the exile community as if it had always existed--arising in an organic fashion from a glorious past and reaching toward some pre-ordained, yet wholly new future. Judging from the mural at La Ermita de la Caridad, the future is wholly masculine--a set of largely

European, vigorous, rational male agents gathered around a female figure that translates the many into the one under her skirts.

Dangerous Beauties: Mad Mothers and Born-Whores

During the Elián Gonzalez case, the Virgin of Charity "appeared" in Miami, first as an oily mark on a Totalbank window. She then appeared to Elián's cousin and primary caregiver, Marisleysis Gonzalez, in a mirror in the boy's room. The day after the boy was removed by federal agents from the Little Havana home of his relatives, nearly every news account lingered on images of a broken statue of the Virgin of Charity, smashed during the raid. The following day, on Easter Sunday, an emotional mass was held in honor of Elián at the shrine La Ermita de la Caridad.

A clearly bemused press made much of Marisleysis' claim of having seen the Virgin of Charity. And it may very well be that when Marisleysis perceived images of the Caridad, she "entered the realm of the delusional," as Andrew Cohen of the Toronto Globe put it. But she did so in a manner perfectly in keeping with gender codes that ascribe power to women primarily in the form of maternal privilege and encode femininity as the kind of emotional frailty epitomized by Mari's dozen hospitalizations for "exhaustion" and "stress." As Stephanie Smith points out, the ease with which we became accustomed to such instability may "illustrate the schizophrenia inherent--and still endemic--to that state named 'maternity'" (Conceived by Liberty 99).

Women are seen as "naturally" bound to children by virtue of bodily functions, especially the process of lactation. Breast milk is attributed with the transmission not only of national identity, but patriotic fervor. During the French revolution, the figure of a young and bare-breasted Marianne was said to have "nursed" the new republic with the milk of liberty. The Maceo brothers--heroes of the Cuban War of Independence--were

said to have suckled their natural love of country (and their hatred of Spain) at the breast of their prolific and bellicose mother, Mariana Grajales--the Mother of the Cuba.

Arguments to keep Elián in the United States claimed a special bond between the boy and his pretty, young cousin Marisleysis, who became naturalized as the boy's "surrogate" mother by virtue of bodily fluids, specifically tears and milk. In exile Miami, the rationing of milk in Cuba is a point of fixation. Elián's uncle, for instance, argued that that it was his "sacred duty to see" that the boy "isn't sent back to . . . a country where children don't even have enough milk to drink" ("Family Feuds" 32). And so it is no surprise that the exile press seemed particularly focused on the chocolate milk Mari made for Elián daily. According to one cousin, when Mari made Elián his milk, she was sure to remind him that his grandmothers in Cuba could not do the same for him because "Fidel Castro wouldn't let them" ("I Love My Child" 25).

Mari's tears, too, were seen as proof of her bond with the boy. Marisleysis' much-publicized crying⁹ and public outbursts, initially akin to the tears of the Madonna, became a kind of frightening excess once the child was gone from her grasp. News accounts reported that after the raid, Mari wept "through interview after interview, denouncing government officials as 'dogs' in a hoarse voice" (García and Viglucci 2A). As Stephanie Smith writes, if motherhood is a "vale of tears . . . those tears may prove as caustic as pure lye, a kind of domestic vitriol" (*Conceived by Liberty* 97). Figures of mothers may act to signal the health of the body politic, but they are also dangerous, for

⁹ One Miami radio station, WINE hosted a contest in which listeners called in to imitate Marisleysis' "wailing." The prize was a box of embargoed Cuban cigars (Santiago and Dorshner, "Outsider Image Bewilders Exiles" 4B).

as Simone de Beauvoir wrote, in birthing a woman's "animality" becomes "manifest" (Ortner 28).

The figure of sacred maternity actually contains within it its disavowal or opposite--the harlot. Indeed, the figure of Virgin of Guadalupe is shadowed by Tonantzin/Maliche, her monstrous "dark" double, with all the racial connotations the term implies. The Virgin of Charity doubles as the sexual licentious Afro-Cuban *orisha*, Ochún. Similarly, representations of Marisleydis slid easily from the position of white-enough mother to that of an ethnically marked and sexually dangerous, inscrutable Other.

In the exile press, Marisleydis was often featured fussing after Elián in the yard of the Little Havana home or bringing glasses of water to the press camped across the street--a sweet, ostensibly sexless Madonna figure. But in conservative, mainstream accounts, Mari, with her olive skin and "brassy" hair, her working-class, slightly accented English, quickly became described as "trashy," mentally unstable and sexually predatory. One writer, for instance, conflated gender, class, color and mental state, objecting to the casting of her character in Fox's "Elián Gonzalez Story" by noting that "the fictional Marisleydis . . . is more rational than the actual one and is given demure brown hair, a small but telling detail. Replacing her artificial brassy color has the instant effect of raising her social class without saying a word" (Jackson 1E). Marisleydis was often described as not only irrational, but cunning--a term that connotes a kind of primitive, animal intelligence. *Time Magazine's* Margaret Carlson, for instance, found her "hysterical," yet "savvy enough to overshadow the Attorney General's press conference with a guided tour through the upturned bedroom" ("Public Eye" 40).

Left-wing efforts to discredit the Gonzalez clan, too, focused on Mari's sexuality. Accounts in *Granma Internacional*, widely disseminated on activist lists during the entire

debacle, often focused on rumors about Marisleysis' involvement with various men-- including a bodyguard, the "fisherman" who found Elián, and Mas Santos, a high ranking member of the Cuban American National Foundation. In a sensationalistic and titillating account, Granma reported the "latest news on the moral undesirability of Marisleysis, the so-called substitute mother" when it "revealed" that Jorge Mas Santos' wife "became furious on finding out about the extramarital relationship between her husband and Marisleysis" (April 3, 2000).

In the end, Marisleysis proved ill-prepared to negotiate what was surely a Byzantine series of scuffles involving hard-line lobbyists, justice officials, militia groups, politicians, pop stars, and assorted hangers-on. And despite a cast which included renowned counselors and mental health experts, no one, it seems, noticed or objected to representations of a painfully young, marginally educated twenty-one year old woman as the "mother" of a 6 year-old child. (She would have been fifteen when she gave "birth.")

La Mulata de Rumbo

*No hay tamarindo dulce ni mulata senorita.*¹⁰ — Cuban saying

The Virgin of Charity, who made several public appearances on behalf of Elián, is perhaps the single most important symbol of *cubanía* or Cuban national and cultural identity. But her cult did not emerge as a nationalist force until the late nineteenth century. In contrast, the sexualized *mulata* as an icon associated with an emerging sense of Cuban identity appears much earlier. The decidedly non-virginal *mulata* is possibly the most commonly occurring trope in Cuban art, literature, theatre and music (Moore, Nationalizing Blackness 49). *Mulatas* were the subject of lyrical music beginning in the seventeenth century, with figures like Teodora and Michaela, María Belén Chacón, María

¹⁰ There is no such thing as a sweet tamarind or a virgin *mulata*.

la O and María Batista becoming "nationally recognized *mulata* icons because of the popularity of compositions depicting them lyrically" (Moore 49). Teodora and Michaela were historical figures, Dominican-born slaves who lived in Santiago de Cuba. The Gines sisters were both freed in 1597 to play and sing for the Cathedral at Santiago de Cuba. Teodora Gines is herself credited with composing the earliest extant Cuban son "La Ma Teodora," likely written in the 1580s (Africanus Edition, par. 4). The sixteenth century "La Ma Teodora" combines a European harmony structure with a series of traditional call-and-response lines asking "Where on earth is Má Teodora?" And replying "She's out gathering wood." Teodora, written by Teodora herself, is not overtly sexualized. She exists primarily as absence in the song, as the chorus asks in vain for her, unable to find her, as she wanders, presumably, in the woods with her "stick and dark skin" (Musical Atlas of Cuba, par. 14).

Highly sexualized images of *mulatas* appeared in the early 1800s, specifically in *guarachas* popular in *casas de cuna*, centers of musical entertainment where "white men went to socialize and/or sleep with women of color and where such women often sought to become involved with white men" (Moore 49). In *guarachas*, she appears as above all, the "object of sexual desire" and "the epitome of carnal pleasure" (Moore 49). In "La negra del manglar," a typical *guaracha*, for instance, the *mulata* says: "I made of sugar, for love/And I am made of fire, for pleasure" (qtd. in Moore 50). She includes tragic elements, as she "pursues physical gratification to the point of self-destructiveness" (Moore 49). More importantly, she also threatens the established social order and is seen as a particular threat to married men and the source of terrific "family discord" (Moore 49).

Mulatas as depicted in *guarachas* also provided material for writers of commercial *teatro vernáculo* (a form with elements of blackface), which was influential in establishing consistent archetypes of the *mulata*. Remarkably, *teatro vernáculo* dominated all forms of commercial entertainment in Cuba from the mid 1800s until the 1930s, and in modified forms until the 1950s (Moore 41). Here, figures of the *mulata*, like that of the *negrito*, served as little more than derogatory comic relief. Writers of *teatro vernáculo*, however, also tended to code anti-Spanish positions by employing racialized characters, often with unpredictable results. In fact, Afro-Cuban archetypes depicted in *teatro vernáculo* came to represent Cuban national identity, primary in contrast to the *gallego* figure. The *mulata* thus came to represent Cuba itself.

The trope of the tragic, sexual *mulata* as dangerous to white men would further become cemented in Cuban popular culture beginning in early and mid-nineteenth century *costumbrista* music, art and writing, which incorporated Afro-Cuban themes as parodic subjects. Examples include the early nationalist music of Manuel Saumell (1817-1870), the paintings of Victor Landaluze and the work of Eduardo Laplante, well-known for his engravings of plantation life and cigar labels or *marquillas*, which often depicted romantic adventures between planters and *mulatas* (Moore 21). As Vera Kutzinski illustrates, *marquillas* included cautionary tales about *mulatas* and their white lovers, often with titles like "Life and Death of the *Mulata*" and "The Wages of Sin." Like the North American tragic *mulata*, she is punished for transgressing the social order.

The most famous Cuban tragic *mulata*, of course, is Cecilia Valdés, who appears in Cirilo Villaverde's novel by the same name. (She, too, likely was based on woman who lived in Havana in the early nineteenth century). Written in exile in New York and first published in serial form 1839 (and definitively 1882), the novel is one of the most

important of nineteenth-century Cuban texts. Set in the Havana of the 1830s, the novel depicts the moral, political, and sexual depravity engendered by slavery and colonialism. The heroine of the novel, the beautiful, near-white *mulata blanconaza* Cecilia, is involved in a love triangle with Pimienta, a black coachman, and Leonardo, the son of a Spanish slave trader (who turns out to be her half brother).

Cecilia is of course, beautiful, but "malicious," duplicitous and vengeful--a "sly demonic angel" (Villaverde 117). Cecilia is irresistible to white men, who lose all reason under her influence. "There was none more beautiful or capable of unhinging a man"(Villaverde 142). Leonardo's involvement with Cecilia threatens his engagement to a girl of his own class and initiates a series of events that result in the death of the promising *criollo* and the loyal Pimienta. "From literary personage, she came to represent all that . . . the dominant (white) culture labeled bad in mulatto women" including the "danger to established matrimony" (Gonzalez 207).

In the discourse of *mulatez*, the *mulata* is valued not necessarily because she is mixed raced, but because she helps whiten the island's population. Presumably progressively whiter over successive generations, she embodies the hope of the nation through the promise of "improving" or whitening the race. Cecilia Valdés, in fact, contains four generations of progressively whiter *mulatas*, the dark grandmother, Cecilia's lighter mother (who is mad, by the way), Cecilia, the *blanconaza*, and Celia's own daughter by her half brother Leonardo.

Cecilia's grandmother tells her that a white lover, even if poor, is preferable to even a rich black husband. Scholars have long assumed the desire to "*mejorar la raza*" (improve the race) existed uncontested in Cuba and presupposed that black and *mulata* women entered "willingly" into sexual relationships with whites. But as Verena

Martínez-Alier concedes, many, including herself, may have "underestimated the extent of resistance to white men's sexual advances by black and *mulata* women" (Marriage, Class and Color xv). Black women may have internalized ideas about "improving" the race. A good many, apparently, were able to buy their freedom and that of their children through their association with white men. Indeed, by the late eighteenth century, women of color far outnumbered men of color in the growing free class of *gentes de color* and mixed-race women even more so. But black and *mulata* women also entered into sexual relationships with white men in the hopes of gaining their freedom or escaping violence and privation--hardly a matter of complete willingness, which requires autonomy and equality, but rather a kind of coercion prevalent in slave societies.

Moreover, slavery was not abolished in Cuba until 1886, which makes women of color particularly vulnerable to rape. While in theory, slaves had some rights under the Code Noir, women of color could not appeal to the courts for protection from rape. By definition, they did not possess "virtue" or virginity in the way that white women did. The *mulata* may have represented Cuba, but she hardly enjoyed many material rights. The discourse of *mulatez* advanced the myth of racial harmony, while obscuring or justifying the social, economic, and political marginalization of people of color, often through pseudo- scientific models of racial development.

The Coming-of-Age Novel and the (Still) Tragic *Mulata*

Beneath a baroque lantern/with Santiago's Morro in the distance/a mulata turns a slow corner/on incendiary heels. -- Ricardo Pau-Llosa, "Ron"

The sexualized, tragic *mulata* reappears in Cuban American communities, again, generally in the context of popular music, literature and art. The mother of all tragic *mulata*, Cecilia Valdes, continues to be popular with Cuban American audiences in Miami, where, as in Cuba, various versions of her story are told and retold in forms

ranging from opera to soap-opera. The University of Miami's 2002 ballet version of the Cecilia Valdés zarzuela or operetta, was wildly successful, selling out consistently despite many repeat performances. Carlos Alberto Montaner, a Cuban novelist and historian, explains that "Cecilia Valdés is one of those key works from which the country's identity is constructed . . . It's very interesting that these artists who were formed in Cuba are continuing to do this piece in exile. To me this means that it transcends politics" (qtd. in Levine, par. 10 - 12).

Representations of the sexualized *mulata* continue to circulate in contemporary work by second-generation Cuban American writers like Ricardo Pau-Llosa and Gustavo Pérez Firmat. Here, as in the past, the figure of the *mulata* functions specifically as a marker of essential Cuban identity and acts to socialize men into the system of masculine privilege. In these works, the sexualized *mulata* exists primarily in the space of memory in Cuba, rather than Miami. A few appear in Miami in muted form, in the case of Pau-Llosa, in a faded photograph. In Gustavo Pérez Firmat's Next Year in Havana, the sexualized *mulata* appears almost exclusively in the form of his memories of his maids in Havana.

Gustavo Pérez Firmat defines Cuban American exile identity specifically in terms of access to women's bodies. As with the exile community, Pérez Firmat configures Cuba metaphorically as a woman—either a *mulata* who is generous with her body or a fearsome and castrating mother. However, he defines nationhood and citizenship in terms of white, heterosexual male privilege. The book's subtitle: A Cubano's Coming-of-Age in America genders the text specifically as a memoir of a young man reaching sexual maturity.

Pérez Firmat employs memories of women in his childhood home in Havana to reinforce his sense of Cuban identity. He mines his memories to write about Cuba. In

Next Year in Cuba, he describes his home in Havana in intimate detail. The kitchen, apparently, was bicultural. On one side of the kitchen, he ate North America continental breakfasts his Virginia-educated mother insisted on. The other side, the Cuban side, was "ruled" by Caridad, the *mulata* cook with a "raised, two-inch scar on her cheek," apparently a reminder of an old boyfriend. Her scar, an exoticized marker, is linked specifically with a dangerous sense of sexuality.

Dangerous or not, the *mulata* is described as sexually accessible to white men. In the essay "Where do you get your ideas about Mexico?" Daniel Alarcón notes that for Chicano national writers, Mexico is often encoded as an Infernal Paradise, a wretched place outside history. But it is also a source for mining literary material and the site of masculine pleasure, typically in terms of young indigenous women who seduce the writer and help him "renew" himself. Similarly, Firmat mines his memories of Cuba to write about Anselia, the *mulata* maid he remembers with obvious pleasure. It is Anselia who "willingly" socializes him into a particular system of male privilege. When Gustavo was 11 or so, Anselia was picking mangoes up in a tree. Vargas, the black "manservant," caught him looking up her skirt and pointed it out to Anselia, who replied: "Leave him, it's good for him" (Next Year 43). Pérez Firmat writes: "I suspect that my recollection of Anselia's white panties, with strands of curly black hair peeking out from the elastic, has been embroidered with subsequent fantasies . . . many were the adolescent dreams I spun around the general theme of 'maid in the mango tree.' To this day, I can not bite into that sweet juicy fruit without thinking of Anselia's undies" (Next Year 43). This passage functions to inscribed power and privilege as access to the *mulata* body. It also associated women with fruit - a common narrative that links women to re-productive natural resources.

In two brief passages, Pérez Firmat does locate the dangerous *mulata* in Miami. He describes an exceptionally nationalistic Willie Chirino concert in Miami at the Dade County Auditorium. When Chirino appears on stage, a "heavy-set mulatto woman with a white scarf on her head and large hoop earrings rushes up to the stage and hands him something--some sort of *santería* amulet perhaps. Chirino bends over to take it, gives the woman a kiss on the cheek, and says to the audience in Spanish, 'Oh-oh, I can see I'm in trouble tonight'" (*Next Year* 4). Because she is brown (and because she wears the white scarf of an initiate) Firmat and Chirino assume she is a *santera*--a *bruja* with magical powers. In another instance, Firmat's mother counsels him and his brothers not to marry black women, not because she is racist, but "because the U.S. is not ready for *mulatas*." She thus describes *mulatas* as potentially dangerous, like uncontrollable natural forces that Americans would not know how to manage.

Ricardo Pau-Llosa, another well-received Cuban American author, poet and art critic and curator, configures the *mulata* in similarly sexualized terms, especially in his collection of poems entitled *Cuba* (Carnegie Mellon 1993). Carolina Hospital describes him as a "tall, sophisticated man" who wears his *cubanidad* in the pocket of his tailored *guayavera* along with his ubiquitous Partagas cigars. Indeed, he is a larger-than-life figure in Miami, where he seems to embody the very "essence" of masculine *cubanía*. Pau-Llosa published his first collection of poems, *Sorting Metaphors* in 1983 through Anhinga Press (Florida State University). In 1998, he published *Vereda Tropical* with Carnegie-Mellon University Press. And in 2002, he released *Mastery Impulse*, also by Carnegie-Mellon., meant as the final book in a trilogy begun with *Cuba*. He is one of the few Cuban American authors who have consistently published collections of poems,

although Pablo Medina, having established himself as a writer of fiction, has recently turned his attention once again to poetry.

The *mulata* appears in Pau-Llosa's work in the space of his memories of Cuba. Of the half dozen poems centered on *mulatas* in the collection and the dozen that mention her in passing, only two poems locate the *mulata* in Miami--Dulce, his great aunt and a nameless *mulata* model who he examines in the form of a photograph.

In many poems in the collection Cuba, Pau-Llosa employs the figure of the *mulata* as quintessentially Cuban. In "Plazas," she is national a monument with roots in the island's colonial past, like Havana's cathedral. Pau-Llosa notes that a famous writer once compared its facade to a "melodious/ fusion of baroque curves and classical columns/My uncle says that's how he always thinks of *mulatas*" (Plazas lines 15 - 17). Here the *mulata* acts as the bridge between colonial Cuba and modernity. But she herself exists beyond or outside history. Moreover, Pau-Llosa invokes the image sexualized tragic *mulata* in deeply essentialist terms, even as he calls attention to the figure of the *mulata* as a literary construct.

In "Dulce" he employs the figure of the morally upright and maternal *mulata*, whom he inserts into his family history in the figure of the great aunt who married his father's uncle. Like Mariana Grajales, the *mulata* mother of the Maceo brothers, Dulce is upright and courageous - the mother of a large clan and a model of respectability and loyalty to whites. Historically, solidly middle-class *mulata* Cuban women who distanced themselves from blacks and modeled behavior and dress after white norms could achieve a level of tentative "respectability" and acceptance in the dominant society. Individually, solidly middle-class women of color were often admired by whites as "the moral

stalwarts" of "good" families. Individually, they may have "commanded respect" but as a group they were often "viewed with fear and contempt" (Stubbs "Free Browns" 28).

In this respect, Dulce has "arrived," succeeding where as Pablo Medina writes, so many *mulatas* have failed to find a fairy-tale ending. In Medina's novel Marks of Birth (Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1994) Felicia is forced to take work in a store next to girls who "slaved" there "not only to keep from drowning in the despair of poverty but with the hopes that those fantasies they had heard in radio soap operas . . . could be their reality: innocent girl of humble origins and dubious racial mixture marries scion of renowned family and is assumed bodily into the Elysian fields of country clubs and servants." Felicia knows however, that their dreams would become "nightmares . . . each hotel room pushing them closer to a time when they would no longer be looked at, talked to, asked out" (74).

Dulce, however, has been admitted to the ranks of an aristocratic white family by virtue of a legitimate marriage. Dulce may not have been particularly liked by her mother-in-law, Tata, a cold, imperious woman - the daughter of a French baroness with "skin like pearls." However, according to family stories Dulce "saved the family" by defending Tata's mansion during the Machado.¹¹ Indeed, in the turmoil that followed the overthrow, crowds looted the lavish homes of Machado's officers and political cronies. Dulce, however, stands before Tata's mansion and shouts "the people of this

¹¹ In the early 1930s, economic disaster, widespread unemployment and hunger, and resentment over American economic dominance and political maneuvering on the island galvanized wide-spread opposition to Machado. Machado reacted with brutal repression, torture, murder and imprisonment of labor organizers, students and anyone suspected of opposing him. When general strike ensued, he shut down the universities and newspapers and extended his term to six years. When the U.S. finally withdrew its support of his administration, he fled the island.

house are our people!" (43). Her brown body serves acts as a boundary and a bridge, stopping the crowd and linking the elite white family to the "rabble" by virtue of her very presence.

Dulce joined the family in Miami. After the death of Tata, she became the new matriarch, holding court "surrounded by an ever widening/circle of reverential white progeny" (43). As in Cuba, her presence seems to provide "evidence" of Cuban exile culture as racially harmonious, just as her figure standing in front of Tata's mansion defended the property of elites by "democratizing" the family.

As a boy, the poet visited her once in Miami. Dulce calls to him and kisses him on the head, saying: "You are beautiful enough to be my own son," a phrase which, apparently, much affected him (43). In fact, the "world got tighter than bones and fire," a beautiful turn of phrase that suggests a tightening of the chest or throat and the warm rush of sensation that accompanies the deep blush of passion, embarrassment or anger. The idea that he could be her son provokes an intense emotional and physical reaction in the boy and makes an impression that clearly lasts into adulthood. The line concludes the poem with a suddenness as startling as a slap or an unexpected kiss.

"Dulce" is the only poem in the collection Cuba to address the *mulata* in terms of legitimate family relations. Half a dozen other poems in his collection center on marginalized *mulatas* outside legitimate spheres-- a *mulata* who lives in a solar, pregnant and abandoned by her white lover, a dress-maker's naked model, a *mulata* walking down the *malecón* to the hoots of *piropos*, the nameless mistresses of important men in Havana.

In one of these poems, "Ambiguities," Pau-Llosa again begins in an autobiographical note. When he was a boy in Havana, his mother's best friend worked at a house of *haute couture* named Rivero's, where on "any given day, the first lady of the

republic/might be glimpsed in undergarments in a fitting room." He preferred, however, a "*china mulata*" model who worked for Rivero. The phrase more commonly used is "*mulata china*." The poet inverts its usual position in Cuban Spanish so that "*china*" no longer modifies "*mulata*" but vice versa. The poet's phrase stresses the Asian identity of the model, denaturalizes a common, unquestioned phrase, and foregrounds the often obscured or ignored Chinese presence in Havana. But in the context of the entire poem, it also marks her as doubly exotic. He dehumanizes the nameless *mulata*, describing her in terms of fragmentation, as a collection of sexualized bodily parts, that is, "impetuous legs" and "peach-half tits" that are accessible to his gaze. She "never curtained me off" (61).

While the poem is momentarily set against the stark socio-economic realities of Cuba before the revolution--prostitutes walking the streets, union busting--the poem immediately blurs historical reality and seamlessly locates Cuba in exile Miami. It is in exile Miami that the meaning of the *mulata* becomes clear for the boy. It is in Miami that the silent *china mulata* provides a link for the two male figures in the poem--the voyeur-boy now grown and Rivero. She acts as a point from which to bond, from which to position themselves within history and to condemn the revolution.

The poet visits Rivero in exile Miami and asks him if he "ever quoted national motifs in his designs:/linen *guayaberas* or the white turbans of black *santeras*" (61). In response, the designer produces a faded photograph of the poet's *china mulata* modeling a dress titled "Republica de Cuba." Here, she acts as the sexualized embodiment of difference, of all three races represented in Cuba, contained in a smart European suit with a pillbox hat, but with claims to essential origin. "That suit was red, blood red like the blood of Cuba." Silent and sexualized, the *mulata* represents a republic which imagined

itself as best represented by the *mulata*, but which looked to France and the United States for its fashions, its movies, its technology, its eugenics.

Transported safely to Miami, she is passed as a faded paper image between the poet and the dress designer - not unlike the *mulata* elsewhere in Cuban letters. In Sugar's Secret: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism, Vera Kutzinski argues that the figure of *mulata* allows for the articulation of Cuban national identity specifically as a site of masculine privilege, fraternal bonding and/or displaced homo-erotic desire (167-168.) Indeed, despite all the cultural representations of the *mulatas* as irresistible to men, the body of the *mulata* becomes primarily a medium of homo-social exchange, a site of bonding that renders women incidental to the formation of male subjectivity.

For instance, in the important *mulato* poet Nicolas Guillen's classic "Two Grandfathers," the nameless *mulata* the poet speaks for becomes merely the site of exchange, of "embrace" between the patriarchs. The grandfathers, one "African," one "Spaniard," meet at the site of the absent black mother, pass through her, and emerge as "Cuban" in the body of the *mulata*—in whom they become equals. "Nowhere in this masculinist paradigm are women, especially non-white women, acknowledged as participants in and . . . producers of the very culture that inscribes its identity through them." In this way, the figure of the *mulata* allows for official fantasies of racial amalgamation in a highly racially stratified and hierarchical former slave society. Moreover, the iconic image of the *mulata* obscures the historical realities of race mixing in a slave colony, that is, the legacy of rape. "Once the messy . . . female participation on the historical process of racial mixing is eliminated and made unrepresentable, *mestizaje* becomes legitimated as an exclusively male project or achievement in which interracial,

heterosexual rape can be refigured as a fraternal embrace. . . across a female body absented by rape" (Kutzinski 168).

To return to Pau-Llosa's "Ambiguities," the *mulata* model's participation in the revolution and in history is made frivolous. "This *mulatica* turned out to be quite a communist./Hard to imagine her in olive fatigues cutting sugar cane/after you see her in my gown" (75). The diminutive term "*mulatica*" infantilizes her, strips her of her historical force and trivializes her. Pau-Llosa also uses her to renders the considerable gains of the revolution for women and for Afro-Cubans insignificant, inconsequential. "Check out the *mulata*/at Rivero's's atelier. She had more revolutions/than she knew what to do with" (61). The poet can't imagine her as participating in history. He remembers her only "naked as a fish" (75). He thus likens her to an animal and erases her from history, sealing her behind embargo walls, freezing her in time. She remains in his memory only as the naked, silent and accessible *china mulata*--in a photograph held up between two men in exile Miami. She does not participate in the nation, in history, but merely represents it for its male citizens.

In "Mulata" Pau-Llosa calls attention to the discursive function of the *mulata*, the literary trope of the tragic *mulata* and the sexualized national discourse of *mulatez*. He elaborates a scene in which a nameless and nearly silent pre-revolution *mulata*, dressed in the yellows of Caridad, with an "hourglass waist" and an "arousing sway," takes a white lover. In "El Capitolio," too, the "powerful are all men in *guayaberas* . . . who have young *mulatas* on the side." His nameless *mulatas*, like Pérez Firmat's Anselia, are enthusiastic participants in their own oppression.

In the poem "Mulata" Pau-Llosa comments on the national metaphors that link the *mulata* to the natural resources of the island--again to certain fruits. "During his mount

the national metaphors for sex/would possess and confuse him/making him hungry . . . /Hunger and the corner café would make him come" (54). Like the *gallego* in *teatro vernáculo*, the white lover is inadequate and absurd, "hurried" and "cheap" (54). However, his, absurdity, like that of the *gallego*, is far out-weighted by his social privilege.

The language of the poem echoes the language of sentimental romance novels and soap operas to comment of the discourse of *blanqueamento*. The mulata, who is pregnant, imagines that her child "would be male . . . and unlike her/her would pass for white. . . All those *novelas* have tragic plots but happy outcomes/No one would accuse him, 'And where is your grandmother?' while pointing a grin at his African nose" (54). Just as the *mulata* discovers she is pregnant, of course, her lover leaves for Miami with his wife, a narrative turn that links the *mulata's* drama to the national drama unfolding around her-- to the revolution, with its own hopes, revenges, consummations, betrayals, revenges.

The poem then moves to the image of mannequins at El Encanto, an upscale department store that was set ablaze shortly after the revolution as a symbol of bourgeois decadence. "She drempt/the mannequins trapped in the inferno/the night she raced out of the solar/amid those most inhuman cries, like those of birth" (54). The melodramatic tone of the poem is undercut by an image that becomes clearer as the poem progresses - the *mulata* setting herself on fire. "Jilted and pregnant,/it's either the whorehouse or death by fire" (54). The image of death and birth, mannequin and *mulata* intermingle like the discursive strands of nationalism, *blanqueamento* and sentimental romances that inform the poem. By the end of the poem, the *mulata* becomes no more human than the mannequin - or a dressmaker's model for that matter.

In "Rum," he continues the association of the *mulata* with fire, as "beneath a baroque lantern/with the Santiago's Moro in the distance/a *mulata* turns a slow corner/on incendiary heels" (54). Here, she is the cause of fire, rather than its victim. "Rum" highlights the syncretic nature of Afro-Cuban religion, when slaves "poured their deities into catholic saints/ and kept them" (26). On a "thin gold chain," the *mulata* wears a medal to the Virgin of Charity,/Ochún really, and another/of Changó, who is Santa Barbara." Pau-Llosa clearly has an understanding of *santería*. But he trivializes the religion by reducing its emblems to sophomoric bits of decoration, a hint of local "color" on a sweaty breast. The medals "stick to her breasts/like postage stamps." In "Mulata," too, the *mulata's* shrine to Santa Barbara next to her bed becomes a bit of decoration equated with the radio playing "tacky boleros" next to the bed. Ultimately, in the work of Pau Llosa, the *mulata* continues, as in earlier Cuban texts, as a figure of desire and disdain punctuated by terrifying, suicidal violence. In these texts, she is endlessly spoken of, but does not speak - a figure outside history that functions to help white men of privilege articulate their privilege.

Magically (Real) *Mulatas*: Re-writing Gender, Race and Nation

Feminist Cuban and Cuban American authors have begun to reclaim and refashion the figure of the *mulata* as a speaking subject and a resistant icon. Feminist historian Jean Stubbs, for instance, has performed the most detailed study to date on the *mulata* Mariana Grajales Maceo, whose figure has long been obscured by normative myth-making. Jean Stubbs examines extant sources to "rethink the significance of Mariana and her life as a revolutionary free brown woman of Cuba in the forging of a national identity" ("Free Browns" 6). She suggests "rethinking Mariana" specifically in

terms of Afro-centric cosmology. Indeed, she suggests interpreting Mariana and her son Antonio as representative of Ochún and Ogún.

While Stubbs' framework provides some interesting possibilities, it threatens to fall into the mire of exoticism, normative mythmaking's "dark" twin. Mariana renounced a comfortable existence to spend ten years in the forests and mountains of Cuba, effectively running guerrilla camps and hospitals under tremendous privation, evidencing a penchant for strategy and considerable knowledge of medicinal herbs. Her life, not yet fully excavated from the wreckage of history, presents more than enough fascinating possibilities to engage scholars for years to come.

In *The Messenger* (New York: Harper Flamingo, 1999) Mayra Montero employs a historical footnote¹² about Enrico Caruso to create a compelling fiction that collides the fate of the famous Italian tenor with that of Aida, a light-skinned *mulata* with Chinese eyes and hair and a nose that identifies her as Lucumí. Aida meets Caruso as he runs, sweating unceremoniously in full costume from the Teatro Nacional, where a bomb has just exploded. Aida Cheng has no idea who Caruso is. But she has been expecting him. Her *padrino*, a fierce *babala'o*, divining her future from cowry shells, has already warned her that a man was coming to "crown" her and make her the "queen of his thoughts." But first she would hear thunder and "the walls would fall down" and "there would be dust and fire," a description of the explosion that brings Caruso to her. "He is not coming to die: he is already dead when he comes."

The novel is structured around similarly haunting passages from the Ifá, the Yoruba oral text employed in divination and around chapters named after movements

¹² In 1920, Enrique Caruso was giving a performance at Havana's Teatro Nacional when a bomb went off. The singer fled and disappeared for several days.

from the opera *Aïda*, which Aida Cheng interprets as the story of the doomed lovers Changó and Yemaya. The story is told from many different voices, but primarily by an aged Enriqueta, the daughter of Caruso and Aida. (Caruso, of course, leaves Cuba before Enriqueta is born. In this sense, the novel enacts elements of the tragic *mulata* story. And like Pau-Llosa's cheap, hurried lover, Caruso spends a great deal of time looking ridiculous and sweating profusely. In fact, Caruso, neurotic, sick and self-deluded, simply pales in comparison to Aida's self-possessed, vigorous voice.)

Like her mother, Enriqueta sees the world through multiple layers of text—through the classic contours of European works interlaced with Afro-Cuban narratives and cosmologies and Chinese Confucianism and mysticism, including the worship of the distinctly Chinese-Afro-Cuban saint, Sanfancón/Changó. As a young woman, Enriqueta had researched every detail of her mother's account, interviewing "witnesses" and pouring over old newspaper accounts of the day her parents met. But by the time she is an old woman, she has ceased in her search for "facts," fully aware that the stories her mother and other old women in her neighborhood tell her are far more critical to her understanding of the world and of herself than official histories and documents.

In "My Name: an Anti-Family Elegy," poet Excilia Saldaña excavates history to recover her *mulata* grandmother, for whom she is named. Saldaña allows her grandmother to speak from a photograph, where she becomes as in life, an "affectionate *mulata* from Atarés," a neighborhood in Havana dating back to the early colonial period (*Bridges to Cuba* 184). In Montero's text, the Ifá competes with Western texts like the opera *Aïda*, but it does not displace them. Saldaña, on the other hand, describes her *mulata* grandmother in mythical terms that de-center the master text of Christianity. Excilia, her *mulata* ancestor "sits at the center" of a throne, "dictating the future of her

race for ever and ever, world without end." As in Montero, the country is "being torn to pieces, in bombings and killings," but the grandmother speaks to the poet and saves her. "I save you and I save my name from oblivion and hell."

Excilia's name, which means exile, becomes a secret word that survives "ships and steel" of the Middle Passage and slavery. It is not an official account of her name, not the "tiny and strange name/in the official papers," but a spell in seven letters that she received from the stars. Her name creates and calls reality into being, like the biblical "Word that remakes chaos." Her name names itself in a dizzying, self-referent progression, like a dream one has in which one is dreaming. Saldaña also redefines the nature of memory and history itself. "My name/in the name of those who have recently chosen their name and/their memories" (188).

Her secret name makes her royal, not in the world of "homages" or "marquees" but in marginalized communities, in the forest, in the *palenques* of runaway slaves, in the "Fifes and panpipes in the secret of the *monte*" and in the crooked back, the "hump/of the *yerberero*," that is, of someone who knows healing herbs. Saldaña equates her grandmother's name with organic, natural elements, with "night and fire" with "cave and sky," with thunder, with "river and honey," elements central to *orisha* worship, especially Changó and his lover Ochún, the goddess of sweet waters.

In "Negrita," Cecilia Rodriguez Milanés, a feminist scholar of African American women's literature, attempts to recover the figure of her *mulata* great grandmother—a woman her "blue-eyed grandfather" refused to give up, even when his family disowned him. "My grandmother didn't tell my mother much about her and it wasn't until much, much later when I began to understand the significance of this for me, of having *una abuelita prieta*." As a result, her great grandmother "takes shape" primarily in her

imagination, shaped by bits of information she has managed to gather about her. "She who buried, killed or left one man" only to be "worshipped and married by another . . . someone with whom she could *mejorar la raza*, even if she already had two dark-skinned daughters." But Milanés finds that her ability to imagine her *mulata* great grandmother is shaped by the texts she has inherited in both Cuba and the United States. "It's no use, all the stories are closed off types in and around Cecilia Valdés, Maurine Peale, Jadine or the oh-so-boring tragic *mulata*" ("Negrita," Little Havana Blues 417).

In The Aguero Sisters, Cristina García, too, creates a narrative rooted in the lost *mulata* grandmother, Eugenia, who represents the very root of *cubanidad* in her novel. *The Aguero Sisters* centers on four generations of women - two sisters (the white Constanica and her *mulata* half-sister Reina), Blanca, their pale mother, their maternal grandmother, a *mulata* named Eugenia, as well as Constancia and Reina's daughters, Isabela and Dulce, respectively. The narrative spans from the turn of the nineteenth century through the 1990s, that is, through Cuba's Special Period and the *balsero* crisis. Through Eugenia, Blanca, Reina, and Constancia, García re-examines the *mulata*, both maternal and monstrous, in materialist, feminist terms - de-centering the language of *mulatez* and *blaqueamento* and the trope of the tragic *mulata*.

As in her first novel, Dreaming in Cuban, García interrogates the nature of memory and history in deeply resistant ways, re-writing history from the margins and giving voice to women lost to history. As in Saldaña poem, Montero's novel, Stubbs historiography and Milanés' essay, García's *mulatas* are complex and surprising. All employ highly matrifocal narratives rooted in the *mulata* maternal body, in aged women, to posit a meaningful alternative to the empty promise of war, to iron and steel, to nation. All use the natural world, the flora and fauna of Cuba, to provide models of resistance

and healing in ways that correspond specifically to *orisha* worship. Changó and/or Ochún are central to all of these texts. And all employ as sense of the ancestor spirits, those demi-gods who link all humans to the realm of *los santos*, or, if you prefer, who link all women to the very cradle of human existence, to cite another origination story, through a mitochondrial language only women possess.

Much of García's novel, too, centers on the fantastic and fantastical *mulata* Reina, Constancia's Amazonian half-sister. Some of most outlandish, "magical" moments in the novel occur in relation to Reina. But her character - capable, vigorous, and unapologetically hedonistic - is so satisfying, so "real" that she almost needs a birth certificate. Through her, García turns a great many conventions of the tragic *mulato* inside out. In fact, Reina is decidedly un-tragic, that is, a profoundly self-determined and decidedly speaking subject. She is beautiful, but in a highly unconventional way that privileges the anarchy of passion over the cold appearance of perfection. She governs her own strong body, enjoys her sexuality on her own terms and with no thought to profit other than her own pleasure. She does not go mad like Cecilia Valdes' mother. She does not commit suicide, jilted by a white, wealthy lover as in Pau-Llosa's "Mulata."

In many Cuban and Cuban American texts, the *mulata* is configured in essentialist terms. She is a biological phenomenon, animalistic to the point of de-humanization. But despite García's focus on the body, her novel re-invents *mulatez* as almost entirely a social process with little basis in essential characteristics. For instance, at the beginning of the novel, Reina, a master electrician, is summoned to repair a prehistoric, man-eating water pump at no other than the mines of El Cobre. In a series of strange events, she is struck by lightening. "Then nothing matters except an unexpected blindness, her heart's rhythm and an exquisite sense of heat" (*The Agüero Sisters* 18). Unlike Pau-Llosa's

mulata, who dies by fire, the decidedly untragic Reina survives, albeit badly burned, and undergoes extensive, painful skin drafts. As a result, Reina becomes, literally, an amalgam of every color that Cubans can take, from the bluest black to the pinkest white. In typical Reina fashion, she even delights in her new patchwork skin, with bits of people from all over Cuba woven into her skin, including the people she loves--her daughter Dulce, her lover Pepín. "Pepín Beltran donated a patch of his backside, Dulcita a long stretch of thigh. Other people, dead and alive, gave Reina their skin, unblistered, unsigned" (35). This bizarre turn of events, which in less talented hands could have proved contrived at best, suits Reina's character perfectly.

Reina is also fantastic in that she is written as the embodiment of two Afro-Cuban *orishas*, the lovers Changó and Ochún. The Virgin of Charity and her African counterpart Ochún appear consistently throughout the novel, on both sides of the Straits, as the force that propels the lives of all Cubans, capitalist or communist, living or dead, male or female, black or white. But Changó,¹³ too, the hermaphroditic god of fire and lightening is also central to the novel. Indeed, the novel focuses on those on those elements of *santería* in which boundaries of gender and race are routinely disrupted. Unlike Paulos and Pérez-Firmat, García employs elements of *santería* not as a peripheral set of "exotic" references, but as a crucial, central framework that fleshes out the psychology of her characters and provides an elaborate, critical understanding of the region. García's use

¹³ He is represented in the Catholic pantheon as Santa Barbara, a martyr. Her father, a pagan king, imprisoned her in a tower and cut out her tongue for refusing to repudiate Christianity. (This defiant saint, who sat on my grandmother's altar along with other more dutiful and demure virgins, was always my favorite.) Santa Barbara appears cloaked in red (our's was velvet), with sword upright in her hand, a perfect parallel for Changó, whose colors are red and white and who appears with a double-ax and/or a mirror. (That's why people cover their mirrors when it thunders.)

of *santería* is neither reductive nor dismissive. It reveals a sustained attempt to study and understand the religion and its complex system of oral texts, cosmologies, hermeneutics and healing practices.

A *santera* predicted that Reina would "belong" to Changó like her father. Her prediction seems, in part, correct. After all, Reina is an electrician who was struck by lightening. In the hospital, she sees the world as draped in fire. "Everything simmered with heat. Fevers rippled like snakes through her room. Her skin gave off a sweetish smoke. Her voice had been replaced by electricity" (36). Electrical appliances and lights buzz and sputter when she enters a room. Clocks run backward or stop altogether. In Miami, she is seized with a craving for red apples (an offering to Changó), eating them by the dozens, seeds and all. Like Changó, Reina is physically formidable and bellicose, and she is taller than most men.

But Reina is also associated with the quintessentially feminine and sexual *orisha* Ochún. In fact, I would argue that Reina's tragedies and family discord arise as result of the two *orishas* battling to rule her personality. In Cuba, on the day she is struck by lightening at El Cobre, she is followed by a "colorful procession . . . of truants" as she proceeds up the hill to the mouth of the mines (15).

Like Ochún, the goddess of honey and sweet waters, Reina loves men, who are drawn to her, well like bees to honey. Like Ochún, she is highly sexual. And like Ochún, she enjoys men only at her leisure and on her terms. At a *toque* or drumming ceremony, one cannot control or predict who Ochún, or any *orisha* for that matter, will "mount" or possess. Indeed, they always seem to choose the most unlikely people for the honor. Similarly, Reina's conquests follow no conventional logic. She ignores cocksure men, men who reduce her to the "size and swing" of her stereotypical *mulata* nalgas (10). She

ignores men who try to buy her favor with expensive or worse, sentimental gifts like flowers. "Why roses? Why not cacti or carnivorous plants?" she asks. (Like her rival, Oyá, the goddess of cemeteries, Ochún has a rather macabre side.) Rather, like the mercurial Ochún, Reina often chooses the "smallest, shyest electrician in a given town for her special favors, leaving him weak and inconsolable for months" (10).

The only man who ever treated her like a "whore," that is, who tried to force her into having sex with him, she nearly killed. But most women are not so lucky - a fact García calls attention to by contrasting Reina with a brutal passage depicting the fate of many *mulatas* and other marginalized women in Cuba. Pau-Llosa and Pérez-Firmat gloss over the dehumanizing aspects of the lives of those women who work in Havana's brothels, encoding them merely as the site of masculine pleasure and power. In fact, Firmat encodes exile as the loss of "place" and of intimacy with his father by arguing that in Havana, he and his father would have known the same people, frequented the same bars and visited the same brothels. But in The Aguero Sisters, García describes a scene in a Havana whore-house through the eyes of a boy to make plain the violence of poverty and sexual exploitation.

In the novel, Herberto, Constancia's husband, recalls the night his father took him and his brother to a brothel in la Chorrera--a notorious and dismal solar in Havana, where he forces the boys, then eleven and nine, to watch him have sex with an intensely silent prostitute, an "opulent *mulata* with Oriental eyes" and enormous buttocks (127). When his father is finished with the "slant-eyed whore" he proclaims with satisfaction, "*Así jode un hombre*" (127) or that is how a man fucks. The experience is clearly meant to "make men" of the boys. In fact, the father orders the boys to take their turn with the *mulata*, but

they are, of course, terrified. He then humiliates them, laughing and asking if they are *maricones* or fags.

The experience is also meant to teach them the division of women into distinctly separate classes, into whores and wives/mothers. "Papa told them that any woman who sucked their *pingas* was a whore"(127). The boys clearly found the experience horrifying and "suffocating" (127). Herberto is haunted by the image of his father having sex with the *mulata* for years afterward. But the boys do learn the lessons their father intended to teach them. On his wedding night, as Constancia "tenderly bent over his loins," Herberto pushed her away brutally shouting, "Don't ever do that again!" and turning his back on her (127).

In this way, García calls attention to the complex intersections of race and class in gender oppression. By writing the passage from the perspective of a boy now grown, she examines the cost of encoding masculine privilege in terms of the sexually and racially classified bodies of women as deeply damaging, not only to the woman dehumanized to the point of becoming silent brown flesh in the passage, but to Constancia-- a white, well-to-do, respectable wife. In the novel, Herberto, too, pays a price for his privilege, dying in an attempt to prove he is a man of action, not a coward or a *maricón*, as his father charged that night in the brothel.

The use of myth typically runs the risk of exoticism at best, totalizing meta-narrative at worst. But despite the deeply mythical contours of the novel, Reina is never in any danger of becoming a mere exotic object, as the *mulata* does in Pau-Llosa's texts and Pérez Firmat's text. Reina's body, her sexuality remains clearly her own, not a racially classified commodity controlled by men for men to serve a particular political

economy. She is a self-satisfied woman "naked and willful" and "gorging" herself, swallowing the "fruit of a female tree whole as a century" (294).

In the rhetoric of nation-building, women are written not as citizens, but as part of the landscape or part of the nature itself. Femaleness itself tends to be associate with "dark and terrifying sexual chaos" (33). Pregnancy and childbirth "sanctifies . . . femaleness" but only if it is controlled and "possessed by the nation, by men who are the nation's ordained representatives, never by alien men, never, never by women themselves" (Hitjens, "Women's Places" 33). Reina's reproductive powers remain her own. In fact, at the end of the novel, she enters the sea, and in a passage combining elements of the lovers Ochún and Changó, wills a fetus into existence in an auto-directed, auto-erotic act of "immaculate" parthenogenesis

The moon is a shadow on her spine As she wades waist-deep into the sea, it slides across her naked shoulders, down her slow brown throat. She is a river of sinew and muscle now, forcing the moon toward her will. Finally, Reina senses the moon sinking within her, lowering itself in her womb. She arches her back, and a tiny clot quickens in the storm of moist lightening, quickens until the first fragile tendril takes root. It . . . brings Reina a wave of contracting, immaculate pleasure. (*The Agüero Sisters* 294)

She is aided only by the moon, traditionally a feminine body, and becomes a fertility goddess in the fiercest sense of the word. In this passage, Reina is almost indistinct from the water and the sky around her. But the moon outside her is no greater than the galaxy inside her. And that galaxy, with its "storm of moist lightening," a beautiful description of capillaries and veins, is hers and hers alone.

Through Reina, García re-claims and refashions the tragic *mulata* in resistant, feminist terms. As we will see in the next chapter, through Reina and her sister Constanca, García interrogates the nature of memory, history, nation, science and the very nature of nature. If, as Simone de Beauvoir wrote, in birthing a woman's animality is made manifest, then in *The Agüero Sisters*, that animality becomes potentially liberatory - a kind of feral freedom. Animals, after all, know nothing of sin or shame or laws or polite social conventions. In García's text, maternity without self-determination proves tragic indeed. But García also posits "unscientific" mothering as a profoundly satisfying if "uncivilized" alternative to the empty, masculine promise of heroism and nationalism, which appear treacherous and absurd in the novel.

Through the white Constanca and the *mulata* Reina, García examine Cuban identity as a set of multiple, racialized, competing, and acutely feminized representations and histories. In the novel's treatment of the sisters, García destabilizes the two nationalist strands of Cuban identity - *criollismo* and *mulatez* - which she renders indeterminate, but equal and, in fact, deeply inter-dependant. García offers no easy answers to the complex, contentious and competing claims about Cuban and Cuban American identity or to the hostility that has characterized relations between Cubans on both sides of the Straits. But she does posit the inexorable pull between women who, against all reason, learn to love one another as the source of survival in the face of patriarchy and violence.

CHAPTER 3 CUBAN AMERICAN IDENTITY AS *CRIOLLO* WHITE

They take us for a kind of female of the American race, and it continues to be urgent that they see us in virile labors: especially when it's certain, that, without the same condition of activity, labor, and ingenuity, the men of the North will take advantage of us. -- José Martí, Obras Completas

On Easter Saturday of the new millennium, Elián Gonzalez, a Cuban boy found adrift in the Florida Straits some months before, was forcibly removed by federal agents from the Little Havana home of his great-uncle, Lázaro Gonzalez. The boy was flown to Washington, where he was reunited with his father, Juan Miguel Gonzalez. The siege abruptly ended a media circus and a grotesque spectacle suspended in the modern master narratives of country, Christianity and consumer culture and deeply dependent on maternal metaphors. The spectacle, as many noted, came to resemble a tacky *telenovela*--afire with all the gloss and hyperbole of a serial romance. The case--in fact a simple custody matter clearly outlined in U.S. immigration law--hardly merited the disproportionate attention it generated in the press. But however marked with absurdity, the case makes a useful study on several levels.

To begin, "Camp Elián," the Little Havana home where Elián lived with his Miami relatives, became a painfully public private space -- at once humble tract house, religious and nationalist shrine, feeble military stronghold and media circus (complete with tents and port-a-potties to accommodate the crowds and the legion of journalists that descended on the house). The spectacle of Camp Elián made visible the interstices of power which converge on the so-called private or domestic sphere. Additionally, the

case, described as an anomaly, actually reflects a long-standing set of patterns in U.S. Cuba relations--a relationship long described in the potent, gendered language of a failed romance. The Elián case made plain the psycho-sexual force of nationalism, articulating those submerged desires and festering resentments inherent in neo-colonial relations.

In this chapter, then, I examine various Cuban American texts of the last hundred and fifty years to analyze racially coded gendered tropes, particularly those that center on marriage, maternity and the domestic space. The Cuban sense of the "modern" arises out of a complex set of North American, Cuban and Continental texts and representations produced at particular historical moments--especially at the turn of the century when the U.S. was first becoming a world power. The development of a modern Cuban American literature is, of course, rooted in a particular structure of imperialistic relations. Certainly, the U.S. military, economic and cultural presence in Cuba, as well as U.S. cultural productions and practices, did much to influence the ways that Cuban intellectuals, authors and officials came to see themselves as a "modern." Cuban American literature re-circulate these gendered ideas of nation and race, writing and rewriting the idea of US/Cuba relations as a racialized "marriage."

I examine Mary Peabody Mann's Juanita: A Romance of Life in Real Cuba Fifty Years Ago (1887) and Cristina García's The Agüero Sisters (1997) to explore constructions of Cuba identity as white and to analyze issues of gender and "national" identity in Cuban American arts and letters. Together, Mary Peabody Mann's Juanita and Cristina García's The Agüero Sisters span a broad historical range, from the 1830s (at the height of annexation debates) and concluding after Cuba's "Special Period" in the 1990s. Examining these two novels together allows me to trace gender, race and nation in Cuban American literature, specifically at the level of the domestic and in the context of

interactions between Cuba and the United States. In both Mann and García, the historical and the political are manifested in and worked out through racialized familial relationships – both matrimonial and maternal. Through these two novels, I find that gendered, often maternal metaphors serve shifting purposes – both ameliorating and intensifying American fears about the brown hordes to the south.

In Juanita, published in the United States in 1887 during a renewed effort to acquire Cuba, Mann employs the use of white, American-educated *criollas* and North American women living in Cuba as providing the hope of “civilizing” the island through sound mothering and intercourse with liberal American reform traditions, often as couched in the language of domestication. She also employs the narratively linked figures of the white Carolina and the light-skinned *mulata* Juanita to work through the intricacies of Luvidico's emerging Cuban Creole consciousness. Similarly, in The Agüero Sisters García employs two women—one white, one *mulata*—to explore the meanings of Cuban identity as a set of competing, racialized discourses shaped in the context of the American presence on the island, particularly after American occupation in 1898 and during the First Republic (1902 – 1933). Like Mann, García's novel posits relationships between Cubans and North Americans as troubling but potentially liberatory. And like Mann, she examines the deeply personal cost of the political, specifically in the context of familial relations. Through the white Constancia and the *mulata* Reina, García examine Cuban identity as a set of multiple, racialized, competing, and acutely feminized representations and histories. In the novel's treatment of the sisters, García destabilizes the two nationalist strands of Cuban identity – *criollismo* and *mulatez*—which she renders indeterminate, but equal and, in fact, deeply inter-dependant. Ultimately, Mann offers no easy answers to the question of slavery and the question of Cuba's annexation. García,

too, offers no easy answers to the complex, contentious and competing claims about Cuban identity or to the hostility that has characterized relations between Cubans on both sides of the Straits other than the inexorable pull between women who, against all reason, love one another.

In negotiating the fear of the "Hispanicization" of United States population and culture, responses on both sides of the issue have long been to construct American identity through distinctly gendered terms. During the years leading up to American intervention in the Cuban War of Independence, those eager for war pointed to the suffering of Cuban mothers and often coded intervention as question of defending Cuba's "honor" from a rapacious Spain. Representations of Cuba as damsel in distress certainly served to arouse early support for the "splendid little war."

But gendered images also expressed anti-annexations fears about incorporating a racial other into the Union. One particularly paternalistic political cartoon published in Puck in 1898 and entitled "Save Me from My Friends," depicted Cuba as a wild-eyed woman pleading for Uncle Sam's protection. But here, Cuba cowering on her knees with her hands folded in supplication; a scowling Uncle Sam shelters her under an American flag as she looks wildly over her shoulder at a band of insurgents. Cuba's skin is decidedly "swarthy," especially in contrast to Uncle Sam's pink-pale hand and face. Her black hair hangs loosely down her back in waves that border on the unkempt. Her eyes seem to roll violently against her dark face. She is barefoot with one long, dark set of detailed toes visible beneath her skirt. With her dark skin, wild hair and eyes and frantic expression, Cuba seems irrational, unpredictable. The cartoon appeared just before the official U.S. occupation of Cuba began – a time when the U.S. justified military intervention by claims of restoring order.

Images of Cuba as a docile, desirable, if vaguely exotic girl later served to ameliorate anxieties about the brown hordes to the south, particularly after Cuba was safely deemed a "protectorate" rather than a state. For instance, In "Miss Cuba Receives an Invitation," published in the Chicago Record-Herald in 1901, "Cuba Libre" is depicted as decidedly appealing--a delicate, calm beauty with an elegant, small nose and a slim, pretty waist (Benjamin, The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution 57). A fair-haired Miss North America, with a vaguely Greco-Roman tunic and nearly arranged coif, instructs Cuba by pointing to a map of North America. In contrast, Cuba's long straight hair is black and held in waist-length braids with a few bedraggled strands at the end. She wears prominent hoop earrings, suggesting a kind of Spanish exoticism. While North America seems to float above the corporeal plane, our pretty Cuban maiden is depicted barefoot, suggesting poverty, backwardness or even sensuality.

More recently, Elián Gonzalez, with his cherubic smile and relatively golden good looks, reduced what many remember as a Cold War menace to a tiny, somewhat sexualized and consumable poster-child for U.S. superiority and paternal privilege. Marisleyxis Gonzalez, the cousin often photographed with Elián in the U.S., became naturalized as the boy's "surrogate" virgin-mother, apparently by virtue of her tears. On the left, activist calls to action attacked Marisleyxis as a harlot hysteric. And reporters on both sides of the debates tended to described Mari as a passionate firebrand in a familiar, sexualized and racially coded journalistic shorthand not unlike the colonial travelogues of the last two centuries. In the Elián case, maternal and familial metaphors operated comfortably in the right-wing rhetoric of the Cuban American National Foundation as well as in Fidel Castro's socialist speeches. Certainly, the force of maternal tropes was

not lost on *los federales*, who deliberately chose a young, Spanish-speaking woman as the agent who would "cradle" Elián in a blanket in parody of comfort during the raid. Judging from the highly visible and emotionally charged March of the Million Mothers in Havana and the protests of Mothers Against Repression in Miami inspired by the Elián Gonzalez case, maternal metaphors function to mobilize and politicize groups similarly--both on the left and on the right. It is within this set of contradictory representations that familial, romantic and maternal metaphors operated in the Elián Gonzalez case to form a racial inflected, gendered discourse of the domestic. And it is in the context of this complex of representations that I examine Mann and García's texts.

Mary Peabody Mann's Juanita

Mary Peabody Mann's abolitionist and annexationist novel Juanita: A Romance of Real Life in Cuba Fifty Years Ago (1887) interweaves the story of several romances, including the story of two run away slaves and a tragic *mulata* story centered on it's "proud moorish" title character. Juanita includes two white Cuban women educated in American boarding schools, Carolina Rodriguez, who returns to Cuba to marry and claim her sugar estate, and Isabella Rodriguez, who attended a Philadelphia finishing school as a girl with the pale, semi-invisible and ghostly narrator, Miss Helen Wentworth. This makes the novel particularly useful for my purposes in that it reveals a nascent sense of Cuban national identity linked to American institutions and interests among *criollo* elites. In fact, the novel is populated by figures that glide easily between North and South, including Cuban elites and wealthy American expatriates.

The novel interrogates the position of women both black and white in a slave-holding society and belongs to a tradition of abolitionist texts which focus on slavery as morally indefensible based on the fact that it corrupts family life. Like Mann's other

books, Juanita illustrates a concern with domestic virtues and morality. In the introduction to the recent re-publication of the novel, Patricia Ard notes that like "many writers of sentimental fiction, Mann seeks to resolve political uncertainties in the sphere of family and reproduction" ("A Historical Romance of Antillean Slavery" xix).

Juanita, based on Mary Peabody Mann's experiences as a governess in Cuba between 1833 and 1835, largely expands on letters she wrote to her friends in New England during her stay on the island--when Garrison and Channing, who Mann mentions in the novel, were beginning to agitate against slavery in the United States. In the late 1830s, too, Southern planters were turning their attention to attempts to annex Cuba in the hopes of gaining another slave state. American steam power and railroads arrived in Cuba in the 1830s and made Cuba's sugar industry among the most mechanized in the world. This intensified sugar production resulted in the expansion of the slavery in Cuba -- and growing fears among white *criollo* planter class of the "black peril." American planters engaged in mechanizing the sugar industry populate the novel. For instance, Isabella points out that "the B---s from the United States are introducing steam-engines in their sugar mills, and are growing fabulously wealthy, because their people are thus released to cultivate new and more extensive estates. They bring all their Yankee shrewdness to bear upon their fortunes" (158).

Mann likely wrote much of the novel soon after her return to the United States. Had her work been published at that time, she would number among the earlier American abolitionist novelists. Certainly, the bulk of the novel was likely completed by 1858 (Ard xvi). Mary Peabody Mann apparently intended to write a preface to the novel, but her death prevented it. Her sister, Elizabeth Peabody Mann instead wrote an "Explanatory Note" for the publication. In that note, Elizabeth wrote that her sister insisted the

"romance" of the novel, however woven into a "work of art of her own imagining" was drawn from "real life" in Cuba. Mary did not wish to insult her friends and so had refused to publish the novel while any member of the family in "whose bosom she had received hospitality yet lived." Elizabeth writes that it "was one of the last acts of Mrs. Mann's mortal life to put into the hands of the publisher the . . . tale."

The manuscript--which had, at one point, been mislaid by her publisher--was finally published posthumously in 1887. The date of publication places it in the context of American expansion westward and overseas and at the center of a renewed, if modified, impulse to acquire Cuba -- not as a slave state but as a matter of extending United States markets and territory as part of its divine "civilizing" mission. By the late nineteenth centuries, the Indian wars were largely over. The transcontinental railroad had already joined the eastern states with the western territories. Alaska had already been purchased from Russia. And in fact, in 1889, the United States would, as it had before the Civil War, offer to buy Cuba from Spain. Certainly, the novel reveals ideas about the "civilizing" influence of North American mores couched in the language of domestication. The novel reflects North American ideas about the moral "degradation" of Spaniards and others in southern climes and posits the adoption of North American mores as the hope of the island, populated with "lazy" and "pleasure-loving" Spaniards. In fact, in the earlier sections, the novel's narrative seems to propose annexation as a means of improving the island through its intercourse with liberal American reform traditions.

"What Can We Women Do?"

Mary Peabody Mann was active with Boston feminist groups, and her novel comments on the limited schooling available to women in the 1830s, not only in Cuba but in the United States. In Juanita, the proper, that is, progressive, education of children--and

women--is often the topic of conversation and of narrative musings. Not surprisingly, Mary Peabody Mann was an educational reformer; she worked alongside her husband, Horace Mann to promote European laws and models for public education. The novel was published in the United States by Boston's D. Lorthrop Company--a major producer of "school of home" primers like Babyland and helpful books for housewives like Domestic Problems, which would help raise "tolerable children at least," as one post-script advertisement in the 1888 edition of Juanita claims. Juanita, Mann's only novel, amounts to a meditation on virtues not unlike her 1857 Christianity in the Kitchen: A Physiological Cookbook and the Moral Culture of Infancy and Kindergarten Guide, which Mary Mann co-authored with her sister Elizabeth in 1870. (Elizabeth, an abolitionist, feminist and educational reformer, is widely credited with founding the U.S. Kindergarten movement.) Like Mann's other books, Juanita illustrates a deep concern with domestic virtues and morality.

In the novel, the liberal education of women is seen as having a potential, civilizing influence on society. Carolina attends a fashionable boarding school in America, but Mann notes that the school served only to enhance Carolina's frivolous, selfish and cruel nature. Isabella, the Marchioness, managed to receive a more rigorous and "sound" education under the tutelage of Helen herself, the governess figure in the novel. Much of the novel attempts to reconcile the Marchioness's education and "enlightened" Protestant faith, her role as a mother with her role as the wife of a slave-owning noble.

The education of Isabella Rodriguez provides interesting observations on the nature of schooling for women in Cuba under the Spanish colonial government. Her father, a mathematician educated in France and Spain, had high hopes for his only

daughter. He had "ambition that she should be one of the women whose names are known in the intellectual world" (Mann 48). Isabella's mother was not herself qualified to provide or even oversee the kind of education Isabella's father had in mind, for as Mann reminds her reader, despite the "peculiar circumstances like those of some famous French women" her father had heard of, education for women remained mediocre at best (48). A sound education for a girl was simply "unattainable in Cuba at that time . . . and no judicious parents would send their daughters to the boarding schools or convents of the city" (Mann 47). Like Martí, Mann describes Spanish colonial society as a den of vice, corruption and sloth.

Isabella is thus sent to a boarding school in Philadelphia. A U.S. education was not unheard of for the daughters of Cuban aristocracy, although French schools were generally considered more fashionable. And schooling in the United States did provide elite Cuban women with relatively improved opportunities and mobility – a fact that many Cuban intellectuals did not fail to notice with some alarm. Saldrigas, for example, warned of sending daughters abroad. Sending sons was entirely reasonable and desirable to enable them to learn from nations "more advanced." Under no circumstances, he argued, should girls be educated abroad as the Cuban woman is, in effect, the "most impressionable creature on earth." To educate a woman, he argues, is to "forget the sacred principles . . . so essential to the defense of the family" ("Revista Cubana" 289).

Saldrigas need not have worried. At Madam L' Blanc's, one of the best boarding schools available in the United States, Helen and Isabella are merely taught "enough French to prattle it a little, embroidery, dancing, a little arithmetic, a few geographic items and a great deal of fashionable nonsense" (Mann, *Juanita* 48). However, Helen's father, an educator and reformer, had "advanced ideas" on that subject of learning for

women. As a result, Helen is "put in possession of her faculties early in life." In Juanita, intellect and morality are linked with Puritan origins, that is, one "nurtured upon the trails.....of early Puritan history which made New England what it is." Helen's "puritanical manners" make hers a "superior nature" that even a "French boarding school could not fritter away" (48). Here, French manners, like the Cuban climate later in the novel, produce corruption, frivolity and cruelty. Puritanical Anglo-Saxon virtues, the use of English, and the practice of Protestantism are linked with order, discipline and morality in the novel. The use of the Spanish language and the practice of Catholicism, however, are clearly associated with backwardness and lack of reason.

Isabella is allowed to stay with Helen in the Berkshires where "they spent happy holidays, running freely over hill and dale, and drinking in the spirit of freedom and independence which characterizes northern society" (49). In fact, according to Louis Perez, the U.S. living in the United States did provide *criollas* with experiences that contributed to new ways by which they came to reject the assumptions of the colonial condition and developed expectations for the new republic. In fact, many notable women educated in the states returned to Cuba to form feminist journals and organizations, eventually participating in the founding of the Partido Feminista de Cuba.

In Cuba, the schooling of girls became a burning issue in the late colonial period in which clashing notions of tradition and modernity accentuated the propositions of gender and civilization. The discourse is rich with "allusions to a complex code of sexuality and . . . control of reproduction" (On Becoming Cuban 88). Maria Luisa Dolz, educated partly in Europe and the United States, was among the first to link education reform with nationalism and women's liberation. In 1879, just one year after the conclusion of the Ten Years War, Dolz implemented a modern curriculum at the Colegio

Isabel--a curriculum that included courses in bacteriology, physical education, history and geography. She traveled regularly to the United States to stay abreast of modern pedagogical practice, lectured and wrote extensively and encouraged women to become educated not merely to become good wives and mothers but to "become full Citizens of Cuba Libre." She helped produce generations of educators "imbued with the doctrine of nationalism and women's liberation" and worked to "elevate the status of women to attain equality with men before the law and in the workplace" (Stoner, From the House to the Streets 36 - 37).

The idea of freedom for women thus became considered an attribute of civilization, which was in turn at the core of what a free Cuba implied. To be civilized, and hence modern, implied a capacity to incorporate women into nationality. In this discourse on progress and civilization proscriptions on women--associated with the colonial regime--were becoming untenable. Thus, in some ways, the U.S. provided both a standard and a source of modernity and offered an alternate framework within which to envision the dismantling of the colonial structures (On Becoming Cuban 62).

When Helen arrives in Cuba to find Isabella well married and the mother of a gaggle of children. Helen's expresses her narrative delight in finding that the estate, *La Consolación*, functions both as a salon and a library of American and European texts. In sharp contrast to other plantations where "books and literature were scarce alluded to," Isabella and her children are surrounded by the best books, periodicals and the newest ideas in "a world of intellectual beauty" (54). More importantly, as a result of her North American education, Isabella does not entrust the training of her children to "negro nurses" as she "had brought with her, from her old New England life, impressions and principles regarding the education of children that her Cuban life had never corrupted"

(Mann, Juanita 41). Rather, "good" Mrs. Warwick, a "staunch New England woman, of the best type" oversees the elaborate nursery and the schooling of the children, who are carefully protected from all save their mother, Mrs. Warwick, Helen and the immediate family. "Mrs. Warwick's superintendence made English the necessary language of the nursery and this in itself was a protection" (51). In fact, English is seen as providing a measure of defense from the "corruption" of Cuban society and its "pleasure-loving Spaniards" (191).

The study of modern science and math are emphasized in the education of the children. A naturalist numbers among the family's favorite friends. Isabella was educated in the Protestant faith in the United States, and the Marchioness has continued to practice a kind of rational Unitarianism she learned among "liberal-minded Americans" and she is able to train her children in its rational tenets, quietly rejecting the Catholicism so clearly associated with superstition and corruption in the novel (50). Learned Protestant clergy are regular visitors at *La Consolación*, including a Unitarian minister, a man of "superior moral and mental endowments" who visited for months at the estate and who left behind his "a great many books" including the works of Channing, a Boston Unitarian minister and abolitionist. As a result, Isabella is able to educate the children in the best spirit of "enlightened Protestantism" (112).

With Helen's arrival, however, Isabella is forced to acknowledge her conflicted position as a woman educated in the liberal North with her role as the wife of a slave holder – a reality she had hitherto managed to largely ignore and to shield her children from. But with the arrival of Miss Wentworth, the Marchioness becomes increasingly unable to ignore the obvious cruelties of the slave society to which she belongs. "Helen had broken the spell and revived all her youthful abhorrence of slavery" (106). Soon after

Helen's arrival at the estate, a new overseer whips an old slave – a loyal, gentle and much-loved family favorite. The novel soon takes on gothic elements, with dark images of imprisonment and various "unnatural" horrors closing in around Helen, Isabella and the children. Ultimately, the Marchioness's sound northern education serves only to make her suffering more acute, as she watches her family deteriorate, corrupted by the vices slavery engenders. She dies shortly before the conclusion of the novel, unable to act on her modern ideas in the context of brutal colonial regime.

Juanita belongs to a tradition of abolitionist texts which focus on slavery as morally indefensible based on the fact that it corrupts family life. Three marriages, both white and black, are ruined by slavery in the novel. Mann describes in graphic detail the act of separating mothers from their children at auction. She also details at length the practice of infanticide among slave women, explaining it as a morally defensible act based on desperation and compassion, rather than animality, as most suggested.

The novel interrogates the position of white women in a slave-holding society. Isabella consoles herself with the idea that her husband is a good father and a kinder master than most and adopts a position of helpless and angelic benevolence. When Helen protests the use of children in the backbreaking labor of sugar making, Isabel cries: "What can we women do?" (183). Mann, an abolitionist and suffragette, acknowledges the similar positions of slaves and women. The slaves are locked in their barracks at night and the women are essentially imprisoned in the house at night for their protection from the estate's dogs. At one point in the novel, Isabella cautions Helen not to step outside after the doors have been locked for the night. An indignant Helen, who had left her chambers to see to an elderly slave who had been brutally whipped, replies: "I see that we are all slaves (43). But Mann challenges the possibility of renouncing agency, noting that

some mistresses are known to be the cruelest of all slave-owners. "In private families, ladies often keep a private whip, with which they slash their maids across the face and neck when displeased with them" (Mann 52).

"Has Not She Red Cheeks?" Blond Beauties and Sable Surrogates

The next morning brought many . . . cavaliers to call upon the fair Americanita. She did not know that a novelty, especially a blonde one, was the greatest boon idle and good-for-nothing Spaniards could see upon the earth.

-- Mary Peabody Mann, Juanita.

The late 1880s also saw the rise of scientific racism in the United States. Anti-annexationist often objected to the possibility of acquiring Cuba, primarily on the grounds of that its racially "mongrel" population made it unsuited to joining the Union. Mann's novel comments on the moral inferiority of the "dusky" races, not necessary as attached to biology, but as an attribute of education and democratic institutions, or rather, lack thereof. But to some degree, the focus of Mann's antislavery position also rests on its corruption of the family and a concomitant fear of miscegenation, which Helen and the Marchioness discuss in whispers and unfinished sentences as they wring their hands in worry over the blossoming affair between Luvidico, Isabella's and eldest son, and Juanita, the beautiful, virtuous and loyal "sable" servant who loves him.¹

In Juanita, the author describes a kind of anxiety rooted in not only the necessity of defending emerging Cuban Creole class over and against the African and the Spanish, but also under the American, that is, under annexationist pressures and a sense of racial

¹ The novel focuses considerable attention on light-skinned *mulata* mistresses, including Dona Joséfa, a woman of "fine education" with "a taint of negro blood in her" who is the paramour of a noble and the mother of his ten children – a Left Handed or "Holy" Family (125). Her daughter seems destined for concubinage, as even their great wealth can not buy the daughter an "honorable" alliance. When told the story of Dona Joséfa, Helen observed on the "chaos" and the "strange state of things" that such practices make of society, where morals are "winked at" and beautiful *mulatas* seem destined for prostitution.

inferiority in relation to the United States. In the novel, Juanita, the virtuous, gifted and gorgeous "sable" house slave who loves Luvidico and Carolina, the selfish, frivolous blond beauty are narratively linked. Both ultimately threaten to derail Luvidico's emerging sense of modern, liberal, anti-slavery position. In fact, the two beauties are joined through a series of metonymic displacements which allow Luvidico to consummate his desire for Juanita without contaminating the racial line of the family.

In the course of the novel, Luvidico, predictably forgets his childhood love, Juanita, and marries the selfish and pleasure-seeking Carolina. Indeed, his young wife leads him abandon his filial duty--an act which breaks the Marchioness's heart and helps kill her. Carolina, our blond bon vivant, is punished in a manner quite in keeping with tragic *mulata* stories. Like the tragic *mulata*, she suffers for her sensuality and her role in family discord and dies in childbirth as a result of attending a party while pregnant. She is thus punished for her undisciplined, rebellious and pleasure seeking nature. (She is miscegenated in her own way, half-Catholic, half-Protestant.) Through Carolina, the text advocates institutional union with the States, even as it warns against the excesses of North American liberty, which would unsex women and destroy familial duty.

Then novel also posits a kind of cultural *mestizaje* rather than a reproductive *mulatez* as the only hope of our young Creole. After Carolina dies, the faithful Juanita raises Luvidico's daughter, Isabella. Luvidico produces a blond child through the body of Carolina, but Juanita produces a sound little Creole in her influence on the child, whom for three years she nurses and raises. "As Mrs. Warwick expressed it, she had "turned into a mother" (207). Luvidico again realizes Juanita's faithful, reserved and dutiful love, and he proposes marriage. Juanita refuses to ruin him, but contents herself with raising his young daughter and becomes a mother in what is described as a physical

transformation, or what amounts to a virgin birth. Mann's novel momentarily defends the possibility of marriage between Juanita and Leonardo. In fact, Helen congratulates him of the proposal, praising his ability to rise above concerns of caste.

In North American tragic *mulata* stories the reader discovers that the beautiful woman in the story is, in fact, a *mulata*. Her miscegenation is her tragedy. In Latin American tragic *mulata* stories, the reader knows from the onset that the character is *mulata*. Miscegenation is seen not as an aberration, but a common, if problematic social and biological reality. The "tragedy" unfolds as a white man falls in love with her, potentially disgracing himself and his family, as is ultimately the case in Juanita.

In Mann's Juanita, the reader knows from the beginning that Juanita is a light-skinned slave. Helen notices the "Moorish" beauty the moment she arrives at the estate. Juanita's "beauty and her tasteful dress attracted the attention of everyone" (62). Mann describes Juanita's appearance in detail. "Her features were very soft, though their contour was lofty, and the rich brown complexion was set off by a highly colored muslin handkerchief, that was twirled into a becoming turban. . . . A simple muslin dress, cut to her throat, with short sleeves that exposed an arm that would make a sculptor rave, set off her Moorish beauty, which bore no trace of the Negro" (62). Juanita is reserved and graceful, lifting her eyes to no one and addressing no one. But the notice of her arm suggests a hint of sensuality that would unmoor men or make one "rave." Unlike the sensuous *mulata* in Cecilia Valdes, who does indeed become Leonardo's mistress, Juanita does not become Luvidico's lover. But her social color, progressively whiter over whitened over several generations, marks her as suspect. Isabella relates Juanita's story to Helen, and they comment that the fate of such beautiful, light-skinned slave women, who "naturally" desire to form unions with white men, is "sad indeed." Isabella comments on

the sexual availability of *mulatas* when she worries about the future of Juanita. She may be a virgin, but as a non-white woman, she hardly has a virtue to defend. Isabella means to give Juanita her freedom, but she worries that if "she were free to dispose of herself, all the chances are that she would be led into temptation by the wicked. These pretty lady-like girls . . . are in a terrible position. There is hardly a chance of their keeping their virtue" (174).

Carolina, the orphan daughter of Cuban sugar nobles, returns from a Philadelphia boarding school "in all respects Americanized" to set Creole society abuzz with her blond beauty. Her complexion, "though not so fair as the average American one, was still dazzling in comparison with the brunette beauties of the tropical island." Luvidico, of course, is instantly "transfixed . . . at her aspect" (94). When Carolina greets him by extending her hand "frankly, in American fashion," Luvidico takes her hand "mechanically, but hardly knew what to do with it, whether to shake it, kiss it, or kneel upon it. Carolina burst into a merry laugh at his confusion. She knew nothing of Spanish etiquette, and did not care for any. An American boarding school girl from one of our cities is never especially diffident . . . and Carolina had entirely forgotten the land of her birth" (94).

The arrival of the blond, American-educated *criolla* Carolina Rodriguez makes Juanita's role as slave visible to her for the first time. When Carolina asks who "that proud-looking creature" is, Luvidico replies that she is "only my mother's maid" (96). Juanita, of course, overhears the exchange and is deeply pained by the awareness of her place and by the loss of Luvidico, who soon seems to forget she exists unless Carolina requires her services. Of course, Carolina soon "takes pleasure in tyrannizing over Juanita" (134).

Luvidico's infatuation with Carolina causes Isabella much pain, as she quickly sees the frivolous and rebellion nature of Carolina. She is further worried that ties to Carolina will interfere with her hope that Luvidico will leave Cuba to continue his education and leave slavery, which he detests, behind. Helen tries to comfort her, explained the alliance with Carolina as a chance to escape from the deeper danger of his relationship with Juanita. "You must think of his escape from another danger – there he might have inflicted harm upon another" (106). Luvidico's union with the cruel Carolina averts his involvement with Juanita--a possibility that Helen and Isabella find too terrible to contemplate.

Despite her modern American manner, Carolina assumes her position as mistress of a sugar estate with much enthusiasm, relishing the prospect of bending her slaves to her will. On her plantation, small children are used in the dangerous sugar making process – a fact which horrifies Helen and Isabella. But Carolina ignores their objections in her desire to increase production. She "took up her latent character of slave-holder, taking slavery as a matter of course, and proud of her own human possessions, over whom she was soon to preside" (Mann 134). Indeed, it seems that Carolina's boarding school education did not serve to provide her with a model for liberation, but rather to reinforce a frivolous, cruel and shallow personality.

She and Luvidico soon become engaged and preparations for Carolina's wedding soon begin. Juanita and Carolina become further linked through the waist of a wedding garment, which Juanita is required to sew for Carolina. Juanita painstakingly embroiders the garment, stitching her pain into the garment like an impotent Medea. "Patiently and sadly she wrought day after day, weaving her poor heart into the hated garment" (181). Juanita's pain does not transform the garment into a poisoned wedding gift, but rather,

serves to illustrate her precarious and contradictory position in the family. Juanita is both slave and pampered pet. But at one point, the waist of the wedding dress, nearly finished, is stolen by the malicious and quarrelsome "coal-black" field slave Camilla, a reminder of Juanita's unmistakable and unpredictable hereditary stain.

Carolina and Luvidico are married and soon engage in a circuit of parties and entertainment. Isabella's health, first compromised when Carolina leads Luvidico to abandon his filial duty by visiting the morally suspect but charming Countess Lopez, begins to deteriorate. Helen, too, begins to deteriorate, surrounded by horror at the estate, which has become a hateful prison to her. But she refuses to leave until she has helped the Marchioness die, promising to remove the children and Juanita to Boston, where she can continue their education in an atmosphere that is not poisoned by colonialism and slavery. Helen is at last able to leave Cuba, putting the "pure ocean" between her and the corruption of the island.

Luvidico and his father quit Cuba for France and Spain, leaving the estate in the hands of a patient, just and innovative overseer, a Basque who immediately begins to prepare the slaves for their future freedom, as Cubans have begun to agitate for independence. In order to lighten the workload of the slaves, the overseer introduces the steam engine to the estate which "some American planers had, with Yankee energy, brought into use there. The stand still Spaniards were gradually opening their eyes to these wonderful innovations" (202).

Three years later, Luvidico collects the children and Juanita in Boston and returns to Cuba to attend to the Marquis, who is dying. Luvidico again asks Juanita to marry him, but she again refuses. In a reversal of the northern flight for freedom evident in many abolitionist texts, Juanita returns to Cuba with Luvidico as Isabella's nurse. There she

meets with her brother, Juan de la Luz, is apprehended for an imagined role in a slave conspiracy and dies along with 1200 other free mulattos in a grisly fire set by a lynching party. In this way, the novel posits romance as the antithesis of freedom for women, particularly beautiful *mulatas*, and ultimately rejects inter-racial romance and marriage.

As for our hero, Luvidico, completes college in France and the U.S. and return to Cuba, now the polished and liberal master of two vast estates, where he continues in preparations to gradually make his slaves free. As he tells Helen, "where ever I travel, I see men free in proportion to their enlightenment, and so I wish to give those in my power the help of supporting themselves, which is the first step. Cuba is in a sad state of anarchy, as we see when we look at it from abroad, and I wish it could be annexed to the United States, as the first step in reform" (214). Toward the end of the novel, Helen has come to understand that the "wish for annexation, which the United States had so clearly expressed, had far different objects . . . To extend the area of slavery was their wish" (214). But she holds her tongue and says nothing.

Luvidico further transforms his estates in the hope of ameliorating its ill effects. He also begins to teach his slaves the benefits of commercial enterprise, and paying them for skilled work, which "improved manliness of the people" (220). In the Explanatory Note written for the novel, Elizabeth Peabody, relates that the "action of Luvidico, at the end, which lights up the tragedy with a moral glory, is copies from actual life." He replaces the slaves quarters with sound structures surrounded by gardens and "promoted the institution of marriage, to which he gave the character of a festival" rather than the wild dancing which so terrifies the guests at the beginning of the novel. A wedding cake made of fruits and not butterflies as in the African wedding which opens the novel "gave a sanction and dignity to the daily life" of the slaves, a dignity which "hitherto had been

wanting" (220). He thus prepares his slaves for some future freedom for even the humblest home, as Mann puts it, is "sacred ground" (232).

Gender, Race and the First Republic in *The Agüero Sisters*

In 1898, Ten years after the publication of Mary Peabody Mann's Juanita, the Spanish American War would make the United States a world power, adding Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Guam and, to some extent, Cuba to its territories. In Puerto Rico, American officials implemented a program designed to "modernize" the population through a program stressing domestic virtues--cleanliness, order and punctuality. In an attempt to discourage the historically Caribbean pattern of concubinage, marriages were made more readily available, especially in the countryside, and divorce laws were broadened to make them more accessible. Marriage rates failed to rise. Divorce rates rose precipitously, much to the dismay of the island's "protectors" (Safa 1999). This cautionary tale for would-be public policy makers illustrates the failed attempt to construct an American territory, ostensibly on its way to becoming part of a modern nation, as a "civilized" domestic space.

In Cuba's case, the War of Independence concluded, as José Martí had feared, with American intervention. Anti-annexation sentiment had prevailed in the United States, and the island became a "protectorate" rather than a territory. However, U.S. forces raised the American flag over Santiago and excluded Cuban officers and leaders of the Liberation Army from participating in the Spanish surrender. Cuban soldiers, many of whom had been fighting for decades under tremendous privation, were, in fact, barred from Santiago. Even its most decorated leaders were sent home "like women" as my grandfather used to say. Cubans, had, in effect, traded a colonial master for a neo-colonial "protector" and truncated nation-hood. U.S control of the island not only limited Cuban

independence but also “assured the survival of the very social order that the *independistas* (anti-colonial forces) sought to transform” (A Nation for All 10). American occupation forces openly doubted the ability of Cubans to govern themselves, primarily based on their “mongrel” racial composition. As Alejandro de la Fuente notes, Cuba’s military governor, General Leonard Wood, wrote to President McKinley that after being the “Spanish criminal dumping-ground” for centuries, the island simply had too much “mixed blood” to govern itself. Even many ostensible white Cubans, an Oxford professor wrote, possessed a “decidedly negro stain” (A Nation for All 40).

In the late 1880s, the years that saw the development of scientific racism in the United States, Cuban statesmen and poet José Martí questioned not only the innate inferiority of blacks, but the biological validity of race itself. Martí’s writing formulated idealistic concepts of the new Cuban nation as a racial inclusive brotherhood. In fact, he was able to effectively unify and mobilize Cuban *independistas* of varying classes, colors and regions under the Cuban Revolutionary Party. But after the American occupation in 1898, Martí’s racially inclusive vision of the new nation would be replaced by the vision of Cuba as a specifically white, modern nation that took its legitimacy from scientific racism and which found political support in the occupation government and the propertied classes. Proponents of this view fully endorsed the idea of whiteness as a precondition for stability. In this respect, elites coincided with and shared the fears of “the occupation forces” (A Nation for All 25).

The first years of occupation coincided with immigration programs designed to demographically whiten the island by providing subsidized passage to largely poor white men from Spain, particularly Galicia and the Canary Islands. It is at this point in time that Cristina García’s novel, The Agüero Sisters, begins, when Reinaldo Agüero arrives in

Cuba, as his son Ignacio tells us, from Galicia one year after the independence.

Constancia reminds her *mulata* half-sister that "they" are descended from a *Gallego*.

This, she remarks with some seriousness and perhaps some cruelty is what makes them "true *criollas*" (12). Through Constancia's paternal line, that is, her father Ignacio and her grandfather Reinaldo, García interrogates early twentieth century Cuban nationalist discourses of *criollismo*, often associated with gestures toward *guajiros* or white peasants. (Mann describes *guajiros* as a distinct class of Cubans from which planters drew overseers, a rather clannish and bellicose lot.) García's novel critiques and complicates the notion of specifically *criollo*-white as characteristic of Cuban-ness itself.

Blanca, the light-skinned daughter of a *mulata* descended from Haitian-French planters who arrived in Cuba in 1791, appears in Ignacio's biology classroom after the *machadato*. The birth of the new republic was a hopeful time, especially for women, who, under the brief, liberal government of Grau San Martín, won the vote, and began to enter universities in significant numbers. The period, too, saw the valorization of Afro-Cuban contributions to Cuban culture. The first republic advanced the claim of Cuba as a white nation. But with the birth of the new republic, Cubans intellectuals now sought to reconcile modernity with the undeniably sizable presence of blacks and mulattos on the island. For the first time, stylized or "sanitized" Afro-Cuban forms became accepted as representative of Cuban culture. But working class Afro-Cuban culture and Afro-Cubans themselves continued to be viewed as threatening. The ambivalence evident in the vogue of *Afrocubanismo* is reflected in Ignacio's relationship with Blanca.

The Gallego Grandfather

The Spaniard will always be the best ally in our effort to sustain the Cuban personality. Race, language, religion and custom form very strong bonds.

-- Diario de la Marina October 3, 1900

The novel begins with Ignacio's strange birth and memories of his father, Reinaldo Agüero, a musician from the hills of Galicia. According to Ignacio, Reinaldo "liked to boast" that he arrived in Cuba with little more than 10 pesos in his pocket, his violin and volume of the great Romantic poets. As a *Gallego* and a musician devoted to European chamber music, Reinaldo represents the white nationalism that characterized the first republic, when Cuban elites and the occupation government agreed that whitening Cuba both demographically and culturally was a "precondition for civilization and progress" (*A Nation for All* 45).

In most Latin American countries, the Spanish-born population declined after independence. But in Cuba, their numbers actually increased after independence. In Cuban *teatro vernáculo*, the figure of the *Gallego* represented the hated Spanish colonial government. Shortly after Reinaldo arrives in Cuba, a widow who lost her husband in the war spits on him, saying she "could not stand to hear his Castilian accent" (*Agüero Sisters* 59). But beginning in the occupation years, the Spanish immigrant became the racial hope of the island. Between 1898 and 1916, approximately 440,000 Spaniards immigrated to Cuba. By 1929, the number had grown to 900,000 (Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness* 28).

During the early first republic, Afro-Cuban forms of music like the *comparsa* were criminalized. As part of a movement to de-Africanize Cuba, the "dissemination of only those images of the nation that conformed to a middle-class European norm" was permitted (Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness* 71). Reinaldo is devoted to European

chamber music and favors Italian composers. When her first arrives in Cuba, he works for a time playing *sonatines* and *caprices* on his violin in the streets for passersby. Ignacio, who describes his father as an intellectual, imagines Reinaldo must have felt lonely his first months in Cuba, a "refined misfit among courser men" (*Agüero Sisters* 60). As a Galician devoted to European forms of literature and music, Reinaldo embodies the very image of Cuban identity advanced during the early republic. Moreover, Reinaldo becomes a lector at a cigar factory in the small, tobacco farming town of Pinar del Rio. As such, he comes to represent a deeply nationalistic, liberal force that shaped labor relations and cultural practices on the island. (In fact, he arrived during a migration that flooded the Cuban labor market--already suffering endemic unemployment--with cheap labor.)

Reinaldo is much loved at the factory, where as Ignacio tells us, he is "revered" for his "splendid renditions" of European texts like Cervantes, Dickens and Victor Hugo. He continues to play his violin in private, citing it as a link to father who lived "like a pauper" in the hills of Galicia making violins that "no one bought." He also teaches himself to cook as a way of remembering Spain. When he feels nostalgic for Galicia, he recreates his favorite dishes, like homemade Spanish sausage. When he "cooked codfish and bean stew, his eyes watered in happy relief" (*Agüero Sisters* 34). Here, as in Perez-Firmat's texts, Spanish cooking provides a physical link to a Galician past rooted, in this case, to the poor artisan/intellectual class rather than illiterate "peasants."

A few years later, Ignacio is born under circumstances which "predict" the doom of the republic and Cuba's first president, Estrada Palma--a U.S.-educated former annexationist with American citizenship. In fact, through Ignacio, born in 1904, the novel

traces the aborted hope of the first republic.² The day that Ignacio is born, Estrada Palma is touring Pinar del Rio. Ignacio's father is among the many angry cigar workers protesting the visit and the new tariffs on tobacco protecting North American trade (Agüero Sisters 28).

His mother, however, is still at home, preparing herself to join in the festivities, when she goes into labor. Soledad gives birth alone, or rather her labor is attended only by a Siguapa stygian owl, an omen of bad luck, which watches from its perch on a far wall, calling to her and catching her breath "at her very center" (Agüero Sisters 28). When she delivers the nearly 10 pound Ignacio, the owl swoops over her bed "with a dark flap of its wings" and "plucks" her placenta the floor and flies "with it like a rumor out the window" (29). The owl flies low over the presidential parade with the placenta "scattering the crowd and raining birthing blood" (29). The president, terrified, crosses himself and leaps into a bush, his linen suit stained with blood – a maternal malediction with equates women's bodily fluids with contamination. For once, the town's "priests and *santeros* interpretations were in accord: the island was headed for doom" (30). The first republic would, in fact, end in 1933 in a civil war aggravated by American economic and political domination on the island.³

² The first republic, would, in fact, be marked by crisis. Estrada Palma accepted the Platt Amendment, extended his term and won a second election by fraudulent means in 1906. Protests erupted, led in part by Calixto Gomez, a black former general in the Liberation Army who protested the exclusion of blacks from the new nation. American forces put down the rebellion and remained until 1909; they invaded again in 1912 (when approximately four thousand blacks in Oriente province were massacred by the standing army), and again from 1917 to 1923.

³ Between 1899 and 1905, Americans acquired nearly 60 percent of all rural properties in Cuba (Nation for All 105). American companies controlled major industries including banking, public utilities, and mineral rights. By 1927, North American mills accounted for over 80 percent of all sugar production in Cuba, in addition to virtually all railroads, construction companies and other "key interests" (Nationalizing Blackness

Guajiros and Great Men

Through Ignacio, the novel reflects the complex and conflicted relationship of Cuba and the United States during the first republic. During the prosperous years of the Dance of the Millions (1917 – 1919), when many Cubans sugar growers were made rich by their association with Americans, Ignacio, a boy from the tobacco region of Pinar del Rio, enters his first year of college on a scholarship at the University of Havana. Ignacio becomes a research assistant to Dr. Samuel Forrest, a zoologist from Harvard who arrives on the island to teach tropical biology. Ignacio recounts their relationship with much affection. Indeed, Americans – both dangerous and powerfully benevolent--appear in Ignacio's life almost as regularly as *guajiros*.

In The Agüero Sisters, those characters most married to their European ancestry, Ignacio and Constancia, are often associated with the countryside and *guajiros* - white, rural inhabitants of Cuba's mountains and savannahs, both of which function as keenly central elements in García's Agüero Sisters. During the first early republic, white nationalist productions tended to rely on European-influenced forms in theatre, literature and music. Many nationalist texts avoided racial references altogether by invoking the Cuban countryside and idealized gestures toward *guajiros* (perhaps most famously represented by the ubiquitous cartoon figure of Liborio). Like other European-derived Cuban musical forms, including the *criolla*, the *paso doble* and the *decima*, *guajirista* compositions first appeared during and just after last war of independence and served as a “refuge for whites who sought a genre that was at once distinctively Cuban and yet devoid of African derived elements” (Moore 131). Similarly, during Afro-Cuban

119). The U.S. had a hand in the election of every Cuban president of the twentieth century, with the exception of Grau San Martín and Fidel Castro.

nationalist period of the 20s, 30s and 40s, *guajirismo* provided a source for conservatives in search of “native” Cuba forms of expression, who felt threatened by the visibility of black, working class forms in commercial, middle class art settings.

In The Agüero Sisters, García posits and problematizes the idea of *cubania* as a specifically white image associated with *guajiros* and rooted in echoes of the *Gallego* grandfather. Certainly, Ignacio's sense of “authentic” *criollo* identity is rooted in his *Gallego* father. But as a boy, Ignacio has a great deal of contact with *guajiros*. As an adult, he often relies on *guajiros* during his expeditions, particularly in the Zapata Swamp, which also represents the unstable ground of Cuban identity. The poor white peasants, in fact, provide him with not only labor, but with information vital to his studies. His mentor, Dr. Forrest, counts *guajiros* as among the best observers of nature.

Cuban nationalist compositions, like European counterparts which celebrated peasants and “the folk” idealized the *guajiro* in the abstract. But *guajiros* themselves did not escape ridicule or prejudice exhibited by the urban middle class” (Moore, Nationalizing Blackness 131). And Ignacio, who sees himself as thoroughly modern, seems to hold them in contempt as backward and superstitious. In fact, he holds *guajiros* responsible for the extinction of various birds, killed because of superstitious beliefs about their malevolence, even as he himself shoot the last of disappearing species in order to catalog them. As a boy, he defends his beloved birds with a militancy bordering maternal madness. But as an adult, he learns to shoot the very birds he loves and so protected in order to “understand” them, carefully preserving the last of dying breeds and mounting them for display in largely American museums. At one point in the novel, his daughter Reina wanders around his laboratory, convinced that at any moment she will find her mother, stuffed and mounted with a placard announcing her genus, species and

habitat around her delicate neck (Agüero Sisters 99). In fact, Ignacio shot Blanca during a collecting expedition in the Zapata Swamp. Ignacio learned to kill the things he best loved.

Ignacio trains as a scientist under Dr. Forrest, who arrives in Cuba just before the *machadato* in 1933. Dr. Forest, the very image of the nineteenth century gentleman, came of age in the later half of the previous century, when "great scientific advances" including the work of Darwin and Mendel "kindled the enthusiasm of thousands" and "held the key to conquering the Universe." Science was his religion or "mission" and it soon enough it became Ignacio's, as well (118). In fact, Ignacio prefers science to his father's interest in labor organizing and politics (114), a field Ignacio considers sordid and unpredictable. Ignacio apparently has conservative political leanings and argues "frequently" with his father over what they considered each other's "misguided politics" (114).

The years when Ignacio received his training as a scientist, too, would have coincided with the height of American-influenced eugenics movements in Cuba, which found their way onto the island and permeated local intellectual circles.⁴ As a biologist, Ignacio is deeply interested in issues of evolution and heredity, a topic which Cuban scientist remained current with. Of course, Ignacio's letters, which account for one third of the novel, reveal a kind of false modesty that alternates with a belief in his god-like abilities as a man of science, immune to the "passion" and superstition he clearly finds distasteful in Cuban society. As a man of science with conservative political proclivities,

⁴ Before 1898, Cuban doctors and policy makers were, like many of their Latin American colleagues, influenced largely by French eugenics discourses based in Lamarckian ideas stressing environment over biology. But after American intervention, Cuban physicians and intellectuals, like Dr. Aristides Mestre and Francisco Fernandez, published with every leading American eugenicist, including Bateson, Davenport and Morgan. Mestre created the League of Mental Hygiene in Cuba in 1929. And Fernandez

it seems likely that scientific racism would have found fertile ground in Ignacio, though there are only hints of it in his narrative.

Through Ignacio, the novel reflects the complex and conflicted relationship of Cuba and the United States during the first republic. As a young man, Ignacio witnesses American mechanization destroy his father's way of life and devastate the island's native flora and fauna, Ignacio's true love. But as a scientist, Ignacio profits by his association with American institutions, including museums and universities receptive to his work. Ignacio finds academic success, his identification with North America and all things rational and modern becomes substantial.

In 1931, the year Ignacio finishes his graduate training at the University of Havana, Machado begins a campaign of terror and closes the universities. Ignacio returns to Pinar del Rio to help his father die and to begin a study of Cuba's dying birds. The decade leading up to and following the *machadato* were critical in the development of Cuban identity. Economic depression in the 20s and 30s lead to questions about the nature of Cuba's endless poverty and unemployment. "Workers and intellectuals who had never before criticized unrestrained U.S. investment began to do so for the first time" (Moore, Nationalizing Blackness 119). Economic disaster, resentment over American economic dominance and political maneuvering on the island escalated and galvanized opposition to Machado, who reacted with brutal repression, torture, murder and imprisonment of labor organizers, students and anyone suspected of opposing him.

Ignacio's aged and crippled mother is so outraged by the murder of jailed students that she joins the protests and general strikes. But Ignacio finds himself "incapable of any useful action" (Agüero Sisters 152). Instead, in the midst of a near civil war, Ignacio

organized the Pan American Conference of Eugenics and Homiculture, which was held in

begins an ambitious and unprecedented study of Cuba's disappearing birds. He then returns to his parent's house, shuts himself in to write and does not emerge again until after Machado is overthrown. On the merits of his book, which was well received in the United States, Ignacio is made full professor at the University of Havana--where he meets Blanca Mestre.

The New Republic or Blanca: "In Death As in Life, Pure Light"

Cuba is neither white nor black, but mulata. -- José Antonio Ramos (1937)

Blanca, the light-skinned daughter of a *mulata* descended from Haitian-French planters who arrived in Cuba in 1791, appears in Ignacio's biology classroom after the *machadato*. The birth of the new republic was a hopeful time, especially for women. Beginning in the 1920s, feminists mobilized and linked their demands to nationalist sympathies, organizing educational and legal reform, which, indeed, yielded results. Under the brief, liberal government of Grau San Martín, women won the vote, and they have begun to enter university settings in significant numbers (Stoner, From the House 116).

The period, too, saw the valorization of Afro-Cuban contributions to Cuban culture. The first republic advanced the claim of Cuba as a white nation. But with the birth of the new republic, Cubans intellectuals now sought to reconcile modernity with the undeniably sizable presence of blacks and mulattos on the island, two "concepts that North Atlantic racial ideologies had systematically presented as incompatible." As elsewhere in Latin America, largely white intellectuals and artists solved this "ideological conflict through the exaltation of autochthonous cultural elements" (A Nation for All 170, 177). This led to the development of distinctly Cuban forms of music, art and

Havana in 1927 and attended by Davenport himself (A Nation for All 43).

literature that incorporated stylized “sanitized” Afro-Cuban forms for commercial middle-class consumption. By the early 1930s, *mulatez*, as elaborated by largely white intellectuals, had become the core of Cuban national identity. However, working-class black culture and blacks themselves continued to be viewed as threatening. Ignacio seems to share and reflect this tension. He idealizes a *mulata* worker named Teresa at his father's cigar factory, in no small part because she resembles a figure from a *costumbrista* painting. But he displays a keen distaste for working class blacks.

Blanca appears white, but her mother is a *mulata*, and she retains traces of tragic *mulatez*. Ignacio describes as almost transparently pale with a face like a “midsummer moon” and a “shock” of blue-black hair. She exists at the University in suspension from her origins. In fact, Blanca seems to have no history at all. Ignacio may thus project his desires and expectations onto her, and in fact, he describes her as a kind of blank slate open to inscription. When he first sees her in his classroom, she is “quiet, luminescent, distracted” a kind of empty, white space.

When Blanca Mestre appears at the University of Havana, Ignacio tells us, she causes quite a stir, sending a “shiver through the room.” Ignacio reports that many men “succumbed to peculiar vertigo” Blanca inspired. Like Cecilia Valdes, Blanca is tragic in her tendency to attract men, especially married men, whose fate she dooms. A wealthy law student who “suffered” from her “indifference” hangs himself. A renowned professor of entomology abandons his wife and children to pursue Blanca, ruining his promising career and his health (*Agüero Sisters* 183). Ignacio also describes her as having a “streak of morbidity” (186), an element which appeared in the trope of the maudlin *mulata* in Cuban *teatro vernáculo*.

Ignacio describes Blanca in animalistic terms. Like all women, she exists closer to nature than culture—but perhaps doubly so. She possesses an “instinctive” understanding of chemistry and science. “Her gifts had nothing to do with intelligence, which she displayed in impressive abundance.” Rather her gifts were “born of qualities much less tangible. Instinct. Intuition. An uncanny sense for the aberrational” (182). Her talent with chemistry resides at a bodily level, a form of magic that Ignacio is unable to decode. Blanca’s eyes and skin change to take on the color and quality of whatever organic compounds she is working with. “It was as if matter spoke to Blanca directly, revealing its secrets” (183).

Like Cecilia Valdes’ mother, Blanca goes mad. Excluded from science, suffocating under the weight of her pregnancy, perhaps chaffing at the restrictions of a white, middle-class marriage, Blanca begins to unravel. She resents the baby growing inside her like a parasite, lamenting repeatedly that she wished she were oviparous like her beloved reptiles and amphibians (227). She becomes convinced that it is raining in the house and that her teeth are falling out – a belief that suggests the fear of losing control of her body. Five months after Constancia is born, Blanca leaves the baby screaming in its crib and disappears, ostensibly to live with an enormous and unnamed mulatto who later reappears in the novel.

As in the classic tragic *mulata* story, Blanca is involved in a love with two competing men – one mulatto and one white. The trope of the inter-racial love triangle is one of the most “pervasive” in Cuban literary and musical productions, metaphorically alluding to general Cuban social relations by “referencing the simultaneous attraction and repulsion to Afro-Cubans and their artistic expressions that characterize mainstream attitudes” (Nationalizing Blackness 14). The classic inter-racial love triangle typically

involves a fickle white lover who desires an ongoing sexual relationship with the *mulata blanconaza*, but who refuses to marry her for fear of social censure. His mulatto rival is typically honest and sincere in his love for the *mulata* and desires to make her his wife.

García complicates the trope, making both the mulatto and Ignacio potentially dangerous to Blanca. When Blanca returns to Ignacio, ostensibly after two and a half years with the unnamed mulatto, she is bruised and battered. "There were terrible welts on her body, and one eye was swollen shut" (*Agüero Sisters* 46). Ignacio clearly sees the tall, elegantly dressed mulatto who fathered Reina as threatening. In fact, he describes him as a "giant . . . tall as a lamp post and with an incalculable heft" who "loitered" at the end of their street.⁵ But it is Ignacio, in fact, who murders Blanca on a scientific expedition in the Zapata Swamp, where he shoots her like the rarest of birds, perhaps in an effort to "understand" or control the uncontrollable.

In García's text, the "ideological conflict" between modernity and blackness mediated by the vogue of *Afrocubanismo* is manifested in the context of the love triangle, Blanca's madness and a kind of cultural hybridity inflected, rather monstrosly, through North American music and dance. After Reina is born, Blanca surprises Ignacio by wanting to have a party for carnival. (Blanca, of course, dresses as a dazzling bird, and Ignacio dresses in his expedition gear, complete with pith helmet and net.) Blanca hires a bartender from a place called "Happy Pete's." The guests, quite drunk, dance Cuban forms originating with the black urban class to North American music and vice-versa.

⁵ The mulatto, Ignacio notes, has a "touch of Oriental blood" and seems to exist outside of history, as if time "held no consequence for him" (265). He wears a perfectly tailored suit. His affluence seems particularly threatening to Ignacio, who attempts to bribe him to no avail before resorting to begging him to leave his wife alone. Indeed, like the *calzero mulato*, the subject of Landaluze's *costumbrista* paintings, he is impeccably dressed and makes a dashing figure. In Mary Peabody Mann's novel, Juanita's beautiful,

The bartender's "potent libations scrambled everyone's rhythms. Rumbas and *guarachas* were danced to Tommy Dorsey's 'Boogie Woogie,' improbable jitterbugs to the most romantic *danzons*" (267).

The riot of form and rhythm becomes grotesque and threatening to Ignacio when the dark roots of Cuban culture become plain. Blanca disappears at the height of the party, returning with members of an Afro-Cuban *comparsa* – a form of street music intermittently prohibited in Cuba until after the *machadato*.⁶ The party stops, as the guests assess the "gaudy revelers from the street" with suspicion. "They were from Regla, perhaps, judging from the darkness of their skin" (267). Blanca then coaxes a man dressed as Santa Barbara/Changó, the virile, irresistible, violent *orisha* of drumming and lightening, onto the dance-floor. Ignacio reports that she and the "huge, near-naked man" danced "close, not an inch of space between them, so close they seemed an erosion" (267).

The "tragedy" of her racial "origins" is unearthed in the passage through the language of geology. In Cuba as in other Latin American countries, the fear of miscegenation was couched in a language that stressed environment over biology. Here, Blanca's biological race is not as problematic as in North American tragic *mulata* stories.

proud mulatto brother, Juan de la Luz, is also seen as threatening because he is "vain" and "loved [to] dress" (77).

⁶ The *danzón* originated among the dispossessed in the black urban *solares* of Havana and Matanzas during the 1850s. It rose to national prominence after the wars and became transformed into a "respectable" dance among the white middle classes. Even so, the form was criticized as having roots in the criminal elements of Cuba with the potential to result in the "deformation" of European-derived Cuba culture. It was prohibited at various municipal levels until after the American occupation. (*Nationalizing Blackness* 25). Rumbas developed in a similar fashion, becoming popular as a commercial form in Cuban in the 1930s in the context of international primitivism movements, primarily after its success abroad and its popularity in tourist cabarets (*Nationalizing Blackness* 168).

The tragedy is not enacted when Ignacio and the reader "discover" that she is a *mulata*. Rather, her tragedy is enacted when she "reverts" to her origins and refuses to *mejorar la raza*. As they say, "*se le salió el negro*," which means, the black comes out. Such essentialist ideas sleep quietly below the language of Cuban racial discourses, despite the relative fluidity of race. As one of Ignacio's colleagues puts it, "What is bred in the bone, becomes evident in the flesh." And what is "bred" in Blanca's bones, at her bodily core, become plain for all to see. Ignacio is humiliated. Shortly thereafter, he shoots her.

A Yardstick in the Dark: Science, Nationalism and Motherhood

Mann posits sound mothering and sisterly love as a remedy to colonial ills. García, too, employs a deeply matrifocal narrative in which unexpected love between women provides a source of survival in the face of patriarchy and violence. In many ways, the dead Ignacio has continued to deform the lives of the sisters--estranged and suffering each in their own way largely as a result of their mother's madness and murder. But Ignacio's reliability as a narrator is, of course, suspect from the prologue, where the reader learns that he shot Blanca and carried her body back to the nearest village and "began to tell his lies" (*Agüero Sisters* 5). The voices of the novel's four generations of women -- Constanica and Reina, their daughters Isabel and Dulce, their pale mother Blanca and their maternal *mulata* grandmother Eugenia--come to outweigh the paternalistic voice of Ignacio, rooted as it in murder and deceit. Reina and Constanica's narratives seemed to exist frozen and preserved in time at the beginning of the novel. Reina lives surrounded by her father's dead, perfectly preserved specimens. Constanica's need to believe her father has hardened her--a perfectly preserved "specimen" herself. Their narratives, however, become dynamic, if violent, satisfying, if unsettled, as the novel progresses. Through the two women, myth moves from a force that obscures and

retards to one that transforms and reveals. Time becomes multiple, unstable, unwrapping itself concentrically and cataclysmically.

Constancia and Reina's narratives span from their childhood memories in the 40s and 50s, through the 1959 Cuban revolution and into the "Special Period" in the 1990s. Through Constancia and Reina, García interrogates science, maternity, nation and history in feminist terms. García examines motherhood in complex ways – as potentially disfiguring and disempowering, always violent. But she also posits generous, "unscientific" mothering as a potentially satisfying and meaningful alternative to the empty promise of nationalism and heroism. Through the white Constancia and the *mulata* Reina, García examine Cuban identity as a set of multiple, racialized, competing, and acutely feminized representations and histories. In the novel's treatment of the sisters, García both destabilizes the two nationalist strands of Cuban identity – *criollismo* and *mulatez* - which she renders indeterminate, but equal and in fact deeply inter-dependant.

Circumstances which leave Constancia ostensibly motherless and perhaps more cruelly fatherless contribute to a personality rooted in denial of her *mulata* mother and a deep dependence on her father. In her denial of her mother, Constancia mirrors white Cuban nationalist denials of the considerable African contribution to Cuban culture. Despite her hatred for Blanca, Constancia's life is deeply shaped by Afro-Cuban belief systems that serve her well. In structuring the ostensibly white Constancia through Afro-Cuban narratives, García asserts the Afro-Cuban contribution to white Cuban life. Indeed, Afro-Cuban elements have reshaped Catholicism as practiced by whites and have influenced Cuban language, history, music, art, food and family systems so profoundly that one can not properly claim a "pure" white Cuban inheritance devoid of Africanisms.

In Mann, a boarding school education serves only to encourage the orphaned Carolina Rodriguez' cruel nature. The Agüero sisters also attend a Protestant boarding school, where they become further estranged. At the school, their conflicting beliefs about the nature of Blanca's death and a sibling rivalry born of Blanca's rejection of Constancia manifest in strained silence that becomes a gulf between them. At the boarding school, Constancia continues to rebuff Reina's attempts to love her. "All that was essential collapsed between them in those years, collapsed but did not die" (238). As an adult, Constancia is unable to accept evidence that her father murdered her mother. Her childhood need to believe her father hardens into what Reina describes as a stubborn, willful set of "stone-blind lies" (276) and a certain coldness, rigidity and unwillingness to love.

The sisters are brought together across the Florida Straits despite thirty years of separation by the force of their mother's murder and by an insistent series of supernatural interventions they can not ignore. The sisters, in fact, are plagued with an inverted inheritance rooted in their mother's refusal to stay politely buried, so to speak. Constancia awakens one morning to discover her hated mother's face has taken over her own. As the novel progresses, a series of *orisha* possessions and the arrival of a *guajiro* with a letter from her Tio Dámaso force Constancia to understand that she must return to Cuba to reclaim her father's long-hidden suicide letter. Reina is struck by lightning and becomes, like Ignacio, plagued by insomnia. One early sleepless morning, as she roams around the house she inherited from Ignacio and contemplates his favorite stuffed birds, she is seized by the clear knowledge that she has to leave Cuba and joins Constancia in Miami.

The sisters are not necessarily estranged along political lines, as in García's Dreaming in Cuban, where Lourdes, a rabid, reactionary exile hates her *comunista*

mother, Celia, who is devoted to the revolution. Constancia knows she could never have been happy in Cuba after the revolution, but she refuses to participate in the vicious, irrational exile politics of Miami – though she is happy to profit from its nostalgia. Reina is happy enough in Cuba, where she has been trained as a master electrician and is respected in her field. She is, as Dulce puts it, essentially tolerant of the revolution. But after her near death by lightening, she finds herself unwilling to participate in revolutionary duties, refusing to join the night watch.

Constancia, Reina, Dulce and Isabel are deeply suspicious of all meta-narratives, science included, which they reevaluating in complex, resistant, ultimately feminist ways. Reina and Constancia interpret the science they learned from their father in ways which foreground the partial nature of all truth claims. As in Bridges to Cuba, the distinction between public and personal, theoretical and material is lost in this novel. In fact, for the women in the novel, all texts are equal, from recipes for Spanish torts to Marcus Aurelius.

Nationalism on either side of the Straits does not fare well in The Agüero Sisters. As a child, whenever Reina tried to talk to Constancia about their mother's death, Constancia covered her ears and hummed the national anthem, a detail which equates nationalism with a childish denial of reality born of trauma and fear. Cold War politics costs Constancia's son Silvestre's his hearing, after he is sent unaccompanied to the United States during Operation Peter Pan. Constancia "mistrusts flags, understands all too well their steadfast passion for the dead" (81). Reina, is, at best, lukewarm to the revolution, deciding that "patriotism is the least discerning of passions" (196). Dulce resents growing up under the shadow of her dead father, a hero to the revolution who never bothered to meet her and who seems to mock her from the pages of her school

books (70). Dulce, in fact, decides that Cuba is like a wicked step-mother, demanding more and more of its children with no hope of reward. Dulce thus equates poor governing with cruel mothering.

In The Agüero Sisters, maternity without self-determination proves tragic, indeed, a crippling loss of self. Blanca, excluded from working as a scientist by virtue of her disordered, female body, resents and fears the baby growing inside her. Having lost control of her own body and relegated to the home and to the status of Ignacio's "possession," Blanca abandons Constancia without a second glance and disappears. Dulce, too, is horrified by the idea of having her body permanently entangled in another's. Constancia's daughter, Isabel, drifts into the novel like a broken-hearted, post-partum ghost.

But García posits generous, unscientific mothering as potentially liberatory. If, in birthing, a woman's animality is made manifest, then in The Agüero Sisters, that animality may become a kind of feral freedom. Animals, after all, know nothing of sin or shame. In The Agüero Sisters, sound mothering is "uncivilized." Mann understands infanticide among slave women as a compassionate response to the barbarity of slavery, with its macabre proto-industrial mockery of motherhood in the "henhouse" (the slave children's barracks). García, too, understands infanticide or the abandonment of children, a "death without weeping," as a form of self-preservation—a kind of logic, unblinking and effective. Reina makes it a habit of observing the nursing habits of mammals and discovers that Opossums "always have too few teats for their young, inciting a brutal fight for survival among her offspring" (240). Certainly, the discovery is a salient one, given the fact that Blanca abandoned Constancia as a baby.

Blanca, however, nurses Reina until she is five years old. At one point in the novel, Reina observes a calico cat nursing a litter of kittens while it "suckled its own mother's teats" (239). After Isabel gives birth to her baby, Reina asks if she too can nurse. "Isabel doesn't seem surprised by the request . . . Reina kneels and stares at the calm landscape of her niece's breast . . . closes her eyes . . . breathes in the distant scent of her mother [and] settles her lips on her past" (241). Animality, in this model, does not exclude women from the public sphere. Rather, through the transgression of social codes, the novel destabilizes positivist, dualist models that devalue the body and the natural world and empties the idea of woman's animality of its discursive power.

García also posits "unscientific" mothering as a profoundly satisfying if "uncivilized" alternative to empty, masculine Cuban nationalist narratives. Heroism, too, appears as treacherous and absurd in the novel, such as that in which Constancia's husband Herberto participates, preoccupied in with "liberating" Cuba: "Invasion. The word makes Herberto hard as a young man. He can feel it . . . His contracting *cojones*, the same ones his father accused him of not having . . . For him, there will be no more waiting on the sidelines in this shabby empire of exile. Soon he will confront himself in the ultimate exaltation" (124). Here García makes clear her connection between masculinist notions of fathering and of nationalism, and posits a counter-discourse of mothering and familial relations far more satisfying and dynamic. As in Mann, fathering, preoccupied with trade and political squabbles, represents a kind of abandonment. Sound mothering, in contrast, requires sound, just, inter-dependant relations devoid of exploitation.

Women, long excluded by official discourses on both sides of the Florida Straits, have long played a vital role in spanning the distance between Cubans. Women's

communities--private and public, literal and literary--have provided vital, viable opportunity for contact, communication and resistance. After the embargo, the areas that have kept Cubans "bound despite politics" have included primarily those of "family and culture," that is, spheres traditionally ascribed to women. While "official channels of communication" remain jammed by empty or aggressive rhetoric, viable and dynamic exchanges across the Straits have taken "forms associated with female discursive practices," that is "home gatherings, letters, gossip, and other intimate forms of conversation" ("El Diario de Miranda/Miranda's Diary" 216). García's novel reflects that subterranean a community--a "nation" rooted not in symbols or flags, but in the field of women's bodies.

While Herberto is training in the Everglades swamps, once again a metaphor for deception, Isabel has a son. Constanica climbs into bed with her daughter and her grandson. "They lie together . . . as if tethered by invisible vines . . . If only Herberto were here, Constanica thinks, he wouldn't worry so much about another future. His vision would fill to the edges with their grandson's face" (220). Watching her daughter and grandson, Constanica, normally meek, suddenly feels a shift in her consciousness. "Fierce and hissing, no longer buried, the knowledge comes to Constanica whole. She would kill to save him, kill to save them all" (221). It is one of the few moments in the novel of certainty. Otherwise, Constanica, Reina their mother understand history, memory, science as partial and incomplete narratives that must be read against the grain for any sense of understanding.

Cuerpo de Cuba

The novel troubles the idea of Cuban identity as specifically white and *criollo*. Constanica is fond of reminding her *mulata* half-sister that "they" are descended from a

Gallego – a lector who worked at a cigar factor. This, she remarks with some seriousness and perhaps some cruelty is what makes them “true *criollas*.” Constancia certainly seems proud of her European lineage and understandably tries to distance herself from the mother, who in her mad, tragic *mulatez*, rejected her.

One could say that in some ways, the maternal line may be read as part of story of progressive *blanqueamiento* - from the maternal *mulata* grandmother Eugenia to the pale, but tragic Blanca, to the elegant and polished Constancia. Eugenia, the *mulata* descended in part from Haitian-French planters who arrived in Cuba a hundred years before Reinaldo Agüero, the *gallego* patriarch, may be said to form the very origin, the root and core of *cubanía* in the story. (Eugenia literally means first or true gene.) However, to some degree, Eugenia's broken and hidden body forms the hidden root of *cubanía*, but the beautiful white faces of Blanca and Constancia represent it. In a chapter titled “A Root in The Dark,” the white Constancia travels alone to Cuba and literally digs beneath the floorboards of Eugenia's abandoned farmhouse to claim Ignacio's letters. In the novel, Eugenia's body is torn apart twice over, once by pigs and again by pilgrims. Her husband attempts to preserve her body in a stone coffin, a kind of private property he can watch over from his grand house. Over the years, her body is dissolved by “miracle seekers . . . a piece here, a piece there until nothing was left” (296). She thus escapes her confines and becomes diffuses as part of the community. Digging under decaying floor boards of her grandmother's house, Constancia discovers a tiny bone wrapped in felt, very likely a wrist bone pilfered years before from Eugenia's grave, which Blanca carried with her all her life. The “little bone, she decides, she will take home to her sister” (298). In effect, she returns the little bone to the *mulata* line of the family.

However, the possibility of reading Eugenia and Blanca as representing a line of successive whitening becomes increasingly difficult in the novel, particularly though the deeply ironic treatment of Constancia's line of beauty lotions, *Cuerpo de Cuba*. As the novel progresses, Constancia is horrified to discover that Blanca's face has also broken through death and taken over her own. She dreams that a surgeon is rearranging her face, severing "roots and useless nerves" and "reinventing the architecture" of her face. When she wake up, she goes to the mirror in her bathroom and "finds her face in disarray, moving all at once like a primitive creature" (105). Her face soon settles down, but her reflection seems different to her, younger. "Then it hits her with the force of a slap. This is her mother's face" (105). Constancia soon learns to live with her dead mother's face, wondering if it is not in fact, a strange side effect of menopause.

In fact, she even uses an image of her mother's face for the labels on her bottles. Constancia consciously manipulates the fierce nostalgia of her Miami customers, making the bottles look like heirlooms (129). Women tell Constancia that they feel more *cubana* after using her lotions (133). As *Cuerpo de Cuba* becomes commercialized, it becomes increasingly disturbing – appropriating and manipulating "sacred" symbols of *cubania* in the name of profit. When Reina arrives in Miami, she refuses to take a position with Constancia's company, objecting to Constancia's use of their mother's image to make a profit.

Her line also grows increasingly absurd, however, as Constancia develops humorous compliments for every part of the body, like *Codos de Cuba* and *Cuello de Cuba* and *Caderas de Cuba*, a creme designed to combat cellulite. Reina, disgusted, shows her sister her dimpled ass and asks, "Oye, *chica*, since when did cellulite ever deter passion?" (162). Regardless, Constancia's *Cuerpo de Cuba* line sends her customers into

a buying frenzy. Constancia consciously produces her creams in limited supplies to increase demand; fist fights breaking out when her products sell out. Toward the end of the novel, the commodification of her line becomes garish and shameless. She develops a citrus-based perfume modeled and named after José Martí's poem, "Flor del Destierro," and paints her car and her husband's boat in garish florals to promote it. Reina, of course, objects to the "historical appropriation." Reina's objections, like the increasingly absurd treatment of Constancia's *Cuerpo de Cuba* line, makes it impossible for the text to be read as model of *blanqueamiento* rooted in the hidden, broken body of the *mulata*.

Cada Cosa en Su Lugar

García both destabilizes the two nationalist strands of Cuban identity – *criollismo* and *mulatez* --which she renders not only equal, but, in fact, deeply dependant on one another. Through the sisters, García posits Cuban and Cuban American culture as inextricably linked--impossible to understand in temporal or geographic isolation from one another. The sisters require one another to save themselves. Reina is able to undo much of her paternal inheritance, which plagued her with insomnia and near-death by fire, primarily by reuniting with Constancia in Miami. Constancia requires Reina in order to return to Cuba to "discover" the truth about her beloved father's actions and to unearth a fragment of her maternal *mulata* grandmother. In fact, under the guidance of Oscar Piñango, an Afro-Cuban *babala'ó*, the sisters are required to perform Afro-Cuban cleansing and corrective rituals together. Constancia and Reina are instructed to go to a place where the river meets the sea, where Ochún returns to her sister Yemaya, to enact a series of purification rituals. Oscar, in fact, warns them that they will suffer greatly, each according to their own measure of cosmic responsibility, if they fail to enact the required actions in tandem.

The brown virgin and her African counterpart Ochún appear consistently throughout the novel, on both sides of the Straits, perhaps as the force which joins all Cubans--living or dead, capitalist or communist, male or female, black or white. Unlike many other authors, García employs elements of *santería* as an integral, central framework that acts to elaborate the psychology of her characters and the history of the region. García places Afro-Cuban religion at the center of Cuban life and Cuban culture. She positions the Yoruba-based mythologies and other narratives of *orisha* worship on equal footing with Western scientific and philosophical texts, decentering and undermining the master narratives of science, Christianity and patriarchy.

In crossing the Florida Straits in the dead of night, she and Constancia engage in a brutal, honest, nearly mutually murderous confrontation. (Ochún and her sister Yemaya both have a darker demonic side. In fact, the two will fight to death over Changó if they are not separated, taking everyone and everything in their path along with them.) Reina and Constancia nearly kill one another. Reina nearly chokes Constancia to death to choke out her "willfull stone-blind" faith in her father's lies (276), but she stops cold at the sight of Constancia's breast, so like their mother's. Constancia, for her part, nearly crushes Reina's skull with an oar as her sister is drowning. She decides, instead, that "knowledge is a kind of mirage" (277) and pulls her sister from the water, kissing her on the mouth and breathing for her until she can breath for herself. She then cuts open a shrimp tort she brought along as an offering to Ochún, and the sisters eat it together, deciding that it tastes good cold. Revenge is a dish best served cold. But the sisters do not destroy one another. Instead, they begin to extract a measure of justice for their dead mother. They eat Ochún's offering, goddesses themselves--a repast which, unlike revenge, proves deeply satisfying.

For García, as in Mann, love between sisters acts as a source of strength in the face of violence and the patriarchal separation of borders and nations and families. Slavery tests but does not destroy Helen and Isabella's sisterly love for one another. Similarly, Reina and Constanica are able to recover what is left of their love for one another despite years of separation rooted in childhood trauma and their father's lies. Their conflict is worked out beyond national borders in a battle of epic proportions in the middle of the Florida Straits. Their honest, brutal and ultimately unreconciled reconciliation is required to exact a measure of peace for the sisters and for their dead mother. The metaphor seems to suggest the possibility of reengagement between Cuba and the United States, just as Pilar's desire to see her grandmother in Dreaming in Cuban does.

In some ways, the inverted inheritance which plagued the sisters is "put right." What remain of Ignacio's beloved birds return to the white paternal line as Constanica begins to care for the stuffed specimens lovingly, cleaning each feather with protective oils. Reina reworks Ignacio's scientific specimens in a macabre mobile for Isabella's baby – a creation not unlike Isabella's own bird-installations. (For Constanica and Herberto's anniversary, Isabella sends them a series of sparrows trapped in specimen jars entitled "Matrimonial Birds," a gift which perhaps comments of the murderous prison of marriage.) And so in the mobile, Ignacio's birds no longer sit in static positions staring blankly at the world. Instead, they become dynamic once again, a detail that defuses the possibility of reading the ending as reclamation of white, paternal authority.

Constancia, for her part, returns the fragment of Eugenia's body, which Blanca carried with her all her life, to Reina. The little bone thus returns to the *mulata* maternal line of the family, but more importantly, it returns Blanca's most treasured possession to

Reina, who adored her mother. The novel does not reduce *mulatez* to essentialist categories, despite the focus on the body. Through Reina, García re-invents *mulatez* as a deeply social process. Constancia and Reina are both complex, satisfying and surprising. Through the sister, García examines Cuban identity, both white and mix-raced as historically situated discourses and constructs. García offers no solutions to the complex puzzle of Cuban identity, other than the inexorable pull of blood between women who against all reason, learn to love one another.

Ultimately, the novel posits women's relationships and communities as a viable, if "untidy," unsettled and unsettling counter-discourse to the masculinist, nationalist rhetoric that has shaped the contours of Cuban-exile and Cuban national culture. In the next chapter, I examine those deeply masculine, hyper-heterosexual models of nation. My analysis reveals the ways in which Cuban and Cuban American identity have, more often than not, been constructed in terms that foreground women's bodies while excluding women from the political realm. Cuba has, and continues to be, imagined in terms of reproductive women's bodies--as a mother, at times vindictive, at times victim. Cuban and Cuban-exile national identity, however, remains written as a matter of manly honor, male heroism and male rights and privileges. I examine maternal metaphors in the late nineteenth-century texts of José Martí and in the late twentieth-century work of Gustavo Pérez Firmat, a well-regarded critic, fiction writer, poet and professor at Columbia University. I find that maternal metaphors legitimate keenly different political movements--one insurgent and anti-colonial, the other exile-national and "recuperative," that is, concerned with imagining the reclamation of the patria from its "illegitimate" inhabitants. Pérez Firmat's work articulates and defends the exile community's pro-embargo political agenda and its intractable anti-Castro position in acutely gendered

terms. In refusing to acknowledge the contemporary island and writing only from "memory," his work maintains a posture that widens the gulf between Cuban nationals and Cuban expatriates. He defines exile identity in rigid terms that ultimately prove limiting, reductive and potentially dangerous.

CHAPTER 4 MASCULINITY AND CUBAN AMERICAN IDENTITY

When I was growing up, the dozens of Cuban exile *periódicos* in circulation always seemed to include caricatures of Fidel Castro. One of the best ways to insult the most loathed figure in Miami was, apparently, to compare him to a woman. Zig-Zag, for instance, portrayed Castro as a "fat and unkempt woman smothered by a lustful Khrushchev" (Havana USA 104). Moreover, exile periodicals emphasized the "theme of communist evil" with references to the alleged homosexuality of Raul Castro, Fidel Castro's brother and second-in-command. In fact, exile *periódicos* caricatured Raul Castro as "limp-wristed" and dressed in "fatigues, high heels and a ponytail" with flies buzzing about him suggesting not only his poor hygiene but a "deep moral decay" (Risech, "Crossdressing" 62).

I especially remember a sketch of Castro in a short skirt—with hideously hairy legs--flirting with some uniformed Russian leader while grappling behind his back, reaching for an image of Latin America. From this and other similar political cartoons, I learned to think of communism in strangely gendered terms--akin to being a *mala-hembra* (an "ugly" or "unfeminine" woman) or a *maricón* (an effeminate and, therefore, gay man). I was just beginning to get hair on my pubis and under my arms, so the image of Castro's hoary legs sent me into a panic. I remember my rage at discovering that those first few rough hairs simply would not wash off. I felt betrayed. My body, which I had found beautiful when it was smooth and sleek as a dolphin, had become foreign to me. Those few pubic hairs, so like spiders' legs, reminded me that my body was like a time

bomb waiting to go off and disgrace the family. I knew that once I got my period, once I became a "*señorita*," I would lose what little freedom I had to leave the house. (Like communists, women have to be contained.) Of course, I was equally afraid that I might never get my period. I was already fourteen, and all my cousins had gotten their periods when they were still playing with dolls. I was sure there was something "wrong" with me. After all, my aunts accused me of being a "*mari-macha*" or tomboy, and puberty had thus far not been kind. And "ugly" or "unfeminine" women, apparently, were as bad as communist . . . a thought that sent a wave of unnamed fear through me.

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which Cuban and Cuban American identity has, more often than not, been constructed in terms that foreground women's bodies while excluding women from the political realm. Cuba has, and continues to be, imagined in terms of reproductive women's bodies--as a mother, at times vindictive, at times victim, always productive. In Cuba, maternal figures like the Virgin of Charity and Mariana Grajales, the Mother of Cuba, have been used to express nationalist sentiment. But Cuba's central heroes of the independence movement were and continue to be, of course, men--like the great generals Máximo Gomez, Antonio Maceo, and, of course, the poet "apostle" José Martí, whose extensive writings were central to Cuban and, indeed, Latin American nation-building projects. Cuban and Cuban exile national identity remains written as a matter of manly honor, male heroism and male rights and privileges.

In this chapter, I examine maternal metaphors in the late nineteenth-century texts of José Martí and in the late twentieth-century work of Gustavo Pérez Firmat, a well-regarded critic, fiction writer, poet and professor at Duke University. Examining exile narratives from these two different periods allows me to trace the ways in which maternal metaphors function over a broad period and in a range of political contexts. I find that

maternal metaphors legitimate keenly different political movements—one insurgent and anti-colonial, the other exile-national and "recuperative," that is, concerned with imagining the reclamation of the *patria* from its "illegitimate" inhabitants. In the work of Martí and Pérez Firmat, it becomes evident that much of the power of maternal metaphors lies in their ability to naturalize discursively produced claims through the language of "blood" kinship relationships. In this way, the nation—whether insurgent or exile-national—is placed squarely in the realm of the biological—beyond question.

In this chapter, I examine the speeches, letters and journalistic essays of José Martí to examine the use of maternal images to invoke ideas of manly honor, including his idea of the *mestiza* "Mother America" and the figure of the "natural man." In the cause of Cuban independence, Martí employed images of suffering mothers to unify and mobilize Cuban revolutionaries. In speeches given in Tampa, New York and Key West, José Martí referred to the island itself as a mother being raped and crying out to her sons for aid. In fact, some of Martí's most passionate poems and essays employed images of women as suffering mothers—a trope that he appealed to as evidence of the justness of the cause.

The literature of the Cuban Revolutionary Party he founded, however, defined the Cuban nation in male terms—as a fraternity or brotherhood of black, white and mulatto men. For Martí, the souls of black men and white men, aristocrats and landless peasants, became equal, rising as brothers from the carnage of bloody battlefields. Martí noted the participation of women in the wars, both in exile and on the island, where, in fact, they died, like all Cubans, in great numbers. However, the statues of the Cuban Revolutionary Party Martí founded do not incorporate women into the nation as citizens or active agents. Women represented the struggle, but the souls of women who suffered and died

for the cause did not join the souls of former slave men who earned their full humanity through their participation in the wars for independence.

José Martí centralized and organized the Cuban Revolutionary Party largely in exile in the United States, where a considerable Cuban population lived in New York, Philadelphia, New Orleans and Key West and Tampa. In fact, during the Ten Years War (1868 - 1878), nearly 10 percent of the Cuban population resided in the United States. After the 1959 Cuban Revolution, again, nearly 10 percent of the Cuban population arrived in the United States. The North American Cuban community of the nineteenth century, displaced by a colonial power and engaged in the task of gaining independence from Spain, was generally characterized by its liberal, populist nature, not only among its intellectuals and elites, but among its workers engaged in the cigar-making industry. In contrast, the post-1959 Cuban exile community in the United States, displaced by a socialist revolution, is characterized by conservative elements. Certainly, the first post-Castro wave (from 1959-1962) included a privileged set of disproportionately white upper and upper-middle class families. Journalists and writers of the post-1959 Cuban exile communities of Miami and Union City, New Jersey continue to symbolize Cuba as a suffering mother, though certainly not a *mestiza* mother.

Here I examine the work of Gustavo Pérez Firmat, a well-published, exile-identified Cuban American writer. In many ways, Gustavo Pérez Firmat's Next Year in Cuba: a Cubano's Coming-of-Age in America and his Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban American Way are illustrative of the exile-imagined nation. In these texts, Pérez Firmat, like many exile writers, locates the "real" Cuba in a grand past and a triumphant future--a future without Castro. He entertains notions of regaining his family's wealth and status, employing a disturbing sort of erasure that claims Cuba for "real" Cubans, that is, those

elites who left after the revolution. Pérez Firmat's work articulates and defends the exile community's pro-embargo political agenda and its intractable anti-Castro position. In refusing to acknowledge the contemporary island and writing only from "memory," his work maintains a posture that widens the gulf between Cubans nationals and Cuban expatriates. He defines exile identity in rigid terms that ultimately prove limiting, reductive and potentially dangerous.

To a startling degree, Pérez Firmat participates in the acutely gendered dimensions of Cuban exile nationalism and politics, even as he constructs a complex sense of biculturated identity. His work, which includes essay, criticism, fiction and poetry, continues to configure Cuba as a mother--often fearsome and castrating. However, Pérez Firmat defines Cuban and Cuban American identity not merely as a matter of male honor, but as a matter of white, male privilege and unquestioned, hyper-heterosexual masculinity--in terms which literally require an erect penis.

In his journalistic prose for *Patria*, Martí described Mariana Grajales, the *mulata* hero of the Ten Years War, as militantly, mercilessly maternal. She produced not only a great many sons, but armed and joined them in a war against a colonial enemy. Pérez Firmat's mothers are not militant. Rather, they are simply "mean," unleashing their fury not on armed soldiers, but on Cuban men themselves. In Pérez Firmat's work, maternal bodies--coded as monstrous or as part of the Cuba's oceanic landscape itself--serve to illustrate a sense of emasculation and powerlessness.

For Martí, aged mothers represented tireless revolutionary devotion. Pérez Firmat, too, employs the image of an aged mother as a durable symbol of Cuba. Through the image of his grandmother Constantina, Pérez Firmat is able to sidestep the revolution

entirely and ground his sense of *cubanidad* in a far-removed "peasant" Castilian past—a trope that mirrors early twentieth-century Cuban white nationalist discourses.

Gustavo Pérez Firmat employs maternal images alongside ideas of marriage and illicit sexual relationships to work out the complexities of Cuban and Cuban American identity. Pérez Firmat describes his love for Cuba as the love one feels for a parent, and the love of the United States as akin to the love one feels for a spouse. He goes beyond Martí in his use of sexualized relationships outside the legitimate sphere. The figure of his *mulata* maid and figures of North American women or *yegua* (mare) allow him to construct a complex sense of biculturated self, marking the transition from Cuban boy to Cuban American man.

Martí was engaged in a nearly twentieth-century project to create a modern nation that included African-born blacks and *independistas* born in Spain, the "mother" country. But surprisingly, Martí tended to employ metaphors of contract, consent or marriage rather sparingly. Few of his speeches describe Cuba as a wife. "With All and For the Good of All," for instance, describes palm trees as the "brides" who waited for revolutionary men. Instead Martí tended to employ metaphors of maternity and filial duty rather than matrimony, appealing to ideas of "blood" loyalty to legitimize the cause. He imagined the Spanish-born who joined the struggle not in terms of consent or contract, but as good fathers and therefore "natural" sons of Cuba. Moreover, Martí was working to unite under the banner of the Cuban nation a population that included a significant sector of black and mix-raced men who participated in wars in large numbers and who had been promised the elective franchise. Martí employed ideas of Cuban national identity rooted in "natural" categories of "blood" and maternity to help imagine black Cubans as part of the national "family," as brothers to Spanish-born men and white

criollos. In a society where it would have been inconceivable to deny one's "blood" kin, perhaps "natural" categories of maternity and birth produced stronger associations of loyalty than those based on the more abstract symbols of contractual relationships. I would find it more difficult to turn my back on a sibling, however troublesome, than an "in-law," however loved.

Martí defended the *mestiza* Mother America as the legitimate mother of Americans, despite the sons who would deny her because of her Indian inheritance. Pérez Firmat does not employ "legitimate" matrimonial or maternal *mestiza* bodies to represent Cuban identity. Mixed-raced women appear in Firmat's work only outside the borders of legitimate spheres, in acutely sexualized and subordinate domestic figures like his *mulata* maid, Anselia. (Martí, in fact, employed relatively few examples of "illegitimate" relationships and bastard births to code the illegitimacy and corruption of Spanish rule.)

Martí employed the image of blond men to represent North American as the land of "strapping young men . . . bred over centuries to the sea and the plow" ("The Truth About the United States" 173). Images of North American women, however, are nearly absent from his texts, though Latin American women - metaphorical and historical - appear regularly, often as emblems of rebellion and resistance.¹ Pérez Firmat, on the other hand, imagines identity in terms of North American women's bodies, again in sexualized relationships outside marriage. North American women appear in Pérez

¹ For instance, in a speech delivered to a Latin American Literary Society in 1893, he addresses Latin American women directly, without "fear of offending the ladies . . . for one can speech freely of freedom in the presence of American women" (164). Here he names heroic women, the "noble Pola" and Mercedes Abrego "decapitated" for embroidering Bolívar's uniform with gold thread. Of course, he also names heroic women as subsumed under their fathers and husbands, including the "courageous" daughter of a Paraguayan officer, a nameless Columbian girl in calico and the "wife of Arismendi" (164).

Firmat's texts in animalistic terms, as *yeguas* (or mares). They provide a kind of sport, which he describes as an exercise in "foreign relations." In his texts, they also represent the border or boundary between Cuban boy and Cuban American man. The *mulata* maid socialized the Cuban boy into his role as the eldest son in a wealthy white family. The American *yeguas*, however, socialize the Cuban boy into the world of the Cuban American man.

These texts, taken together, reveal that maternal figures function to legitimate political movements both on the left and on the right. Images of women articulate and negotiate national identity precisely because in a Western construct, women are seen as intermediary, linking agents--not wholly located in "nature" but not wholly belonging to the realm of culture or history. That linking quality makes images of women, especially sexualized and maternal images, malleable and potent. In both Martí and Pérez Firmat's texts, the considerable symbolic force of women's images, often rooted in "natural" biological claims, becomes plain. Women's images carry tremendous symbolic weight in these texts, often in ways which call attention to women's bodies and their biological roles as mothers. But the Cuban and Cuban exile nation continue to be written distinctly as a matter of male rights and material privileges. Virginia Woolf found that when she examined the images of women in literature against the absence of women in history,² a queer, dreadful creature emerged--a "worm winged like an eagle." That monstrous, malleable, contradictory creature appears in Cuban and Cuban American literature just as in British texts. Literary tropes both reflect and shape cultural values and policies. Representations, however constructed, can and often do have a direct bearing on the

² "A Room of One's Own," Virginia Woolf wrote: "She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history . . . Some of the most inspired words,

material well-being of women, particularly when those representations render women animalistic or subhuman. As Toni Morrison puts it, just because it is a lie, doesn't mean it isn't real.

Mestiza Mothers and Natural Men

For in what lands can men take more pride than in our long-suffering American republics, raised up among the silent Indian masses by bleeding arms . . . ? Never in history have such advanced and united nations been forged in so short a time from such disorganized elements. -- José Martí, Our America"

In 1869, Spanish authorities in Havana arrested José Martí, then sixteen years old and already a published poet, for writing a "treasonous" letter. He was sentenced to six years hard labor, a sentence his parents were later able to commute to exile. In the introduction to the José Martí Reader, one of the few contemporary collections of his work published in the United States, Shnoookal and Muñiz note that Martí then began a period of "peregrination," living in Mexico, Guatemala and Venezuela, where he founded an important *modernista* magazine and developed one *modernismo's* earliest manifestos (10).

In 1880, he arrived in New York, where he worked as a translator and journalist for North American and Latin American newspapers. He lived longer in the United States than in Cuba (from 1879 to 1895). Writing in both Spanish and English, he published much of the corpus of his poetry, essays and articles from inside the "belly of the beast." In articles he wrote for Latin American newspapers, Martí described life in the United States for his readers on an impressive range of topics, from the Haymarket Massacre to Buffalo Bill and the westward expansion.

some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband."

In a great many of his essays, it is evident that Martí deeply admired the United States as the "the greatest ever built by liberty." But he also worried about the "excessive individualism and reverence for wealth" which like "worms in the heart have begun in this mighty Republic their work of destruction" ("Vindication of Cuba" 208). He was deeply interested in technological innovation. However, in New York and "amidst the din and clatter of an industrializing society, plagued by labor strikes [and] racial and religious conflicts," he cautioned his Latin American readership about the dangers of unrestricted capitalism and manufacturing (Shnookal and Muñiz 12).

In Mestizo Modernism, Tace Hedrick argues that for Martí, a "romantic, anti-positivist, increasingly anti-United States and Americanist celebration of the organic richness of Latin American was conflated with a (somewhat ambiguous) fascination with the modernizing effects of industry" (10). In the United States, Martí began to model a vision for emerging Latin American nations that tempered a desire for modernity and innovation with his idea of an organic brotherhood united in love of the *mestiza* "Mother America." He imagined a Cuba that once free of the confines of colonialism, could look to modernizing trade, education and legal systems for the good of the republic and its people. But he continued to caution against North American annexation, as he had learned all-too-well the rapacious history of the United States, the brutality with which it dealt with its Indian populations and the scorn with which it approached its southern neighbors. For Martí, "the Americanist project, one which had not yet attained freedom from Spain's colonial rule over Cuba and Puerto Rico, already had to look askance at the United States and its dreams of empire" (Hedrick, Mestizo Modernism 21).

In early 1891, Martí wrote one of his most important Americanist essays, "Our America." That essay, like his earlier "Mother America," imagines Latin American as an

indigenous mother and celebrates the mix-raced inhabitants of Latin American as the continent's great strength. "Our America . . . will be saved by its Indians and is growing better" ("Our America" 112). Like the *indigenistas* of later decades, Martí employed the figure of the *mestiza* mother as a linking agent that would unify the "discordant" elements of Latin American countries.

His *mestiza* mother is ailing and neglected by undutiful men born in the New World who would deny "the mother who reared them because she wears an Indian apron" ("Our America" 112). Martí declared those who would deny the Indian mother not only bad sons, but not real men--poorly formed, premature, misshapen infants. Those who would deny their American mother are "seven-month weaklings" with "puny arms" of Paris or Madrid decorated hideously with bracelets and "painted" fingernails ("Our America" 112). Here Martí codes the grotesque not only in the language of infancy, but effeminacy. His repulsive monster resembles not only a sickly infant, but a woman (rather like those images of Castro in skirts that so sent me into a panic as a girl). Women and children³ both exist in the twilight realm between nature and culture, between the animal world and the world of manly, fully formed, rational men.

The "natural man," strong, impulsive and loyal, however, does not abandon his *mestiza* mother, but remains devoted to her--a symbol of manly duty and nationalist pride. Indeed, for Martí, the natural man, was the "real" man who remained devoted to his American mother despite her Indian apron, not the misshapen, monstrous infants and "delicate creatures" who would deny her. "Then who is the real man? He who stays with

³ In many ways, children are only partially human. Small children are "utterly unsocialized; like animals, they are unable to walk upright, they excrete without control, they do not speak" (Ortner, *Disorder of Women* 31 - 32). If children exist at an intermediate place between the animal and the human, the public and the private, then it would seem that this ambiguity lends them a potent kind of symbolic flexibility.

his mother and nurses her . . . or he who puts her to work out of sight and lives at her expense on decadent lands, sporting fancy neckties, cursing the womb that carried him?" ("Our America" 112). For Martí, real men, were natural men who did not deny the indigenous elements of their persons or of the continent.

In Martí's essays, the impulses of the natural man provide the raw foundation of sound American government. The natural man stands in contrast to the "exotic Creole," who with his "imported book" would debilitate Latin American nations with borrowed forms of government. In the absence of government rooted in local conditions and local knowledge, the natural man, "strong and indignant," rises up and "topples" artificial learning and artificial government because "he has not been governed in accordance with the obvious needs of the country" ("Our America" 114). In fact, Martí argues that the vigorous natural man, in the absence of government that understood him or in the presence of one that "disregarded" him, would rule himself "forcibly" and violently to the demise of the republic. "Republics have paid . . . for their inability to recognize the true elements of their countries" ("Our America" 114). Like women and children, the mix-raced, physically strong, impulsive natural man exists in a twilight stage between barbarity and reason. Martí finds his natural impulses admirable, but they must be governed well to produce sound nations.

Martí argued that those who hoped to govern well needed to adopt forms of government, education and art that specifically addressed Latin American histories, social relations and needs. In understanding the natural man, who "respects and reward superior intelligence so long as his humility is not turned against him," good government would win an ally otherwise quick to "forcibly regain the respect" of those who "wounded his pride or threatened his interests" (113). Under governments that looked for Latin

American answers to Latin American questions, Martí argued, a "natural statesman arises." Such a leader combines the vigorous, proud, if impulsive, character of the natural man with the dignity and status of the statesman "schooled in local knowledge." This natural statesman would thus manage to "balance" the natural elements of the country (118).

As a "creator," sound American government would thus join the "headband" and the "hemp sandals" of the Indian with the professor's gown, that is, education, to "rescue" the Indian, to "make a place for the competent Negro, to fit liberty to the body of those who rebelled and conquered for it" (117). Martí thus posits a sound governmental sight for the redemption for the impulsive natural man, that is, from the "discordant," potentially violent "elements" of the continent, and for the exotic Creole, whose artificial and imported methods and ideas of government had "retarded" the nation (115). Through the image of the *mestiza* mother with her Indian apron, Martí defends the mixed-race natural and hybrid qualities of Latin American countries. He defines that hybridity as a fertile, but potentially dangerous natural resource that must be managed by elites for the development of modern governments and nations.

City-Bred Young Men and Dusky Straplings

The men of Cuba are divided into three classes, Spaniards, native men of Spanish descent and negroes. The men of Spanish birth . . . have ruled Cuba . . . with methods that combine bigotry with tyranny and silly pride with fathomless corruption. The less we have of them the better. The native Cubans are not much more desirable. To the faults of the parent race they add effeminacy and a distaste for exertion that amounts really to disease. --- Philadelphia Manufacturer (1898)

José Martí defended the "half-breed" national character of Latin America against elites who had attempted to found new nations on European or North American models. In journalistic prose meant for Cuban readership in the United States, Martí focused employed less acutely racially marked maternal metaphors to unify and mobilize

disparate exile groups for one final invasion and uprising. The *mestiza* mother, of course, is missing from prose addressing Cuban independence, as the indigenous inheritance on the island is comparatively minimal (with the exception of a few easternmost provinces). Here Martí employs nearly racially unmarked maternal metaphors, though he retains ideas about natural law to code the "native" Cuban character, social conditions and relations. His work is focused on mediating white fears about the black "peril," describing black Cubans as loving and able, united with their white brothers in their love of mother Cuba. "Will we fear the Negro—the noble black man, our black brother . . . Others may fear him. I love him. Anyone who speaks ill of him, I say to him openly: 'You lie!'" ("With All" 141).

However, for Martí, the complexities of racial consolidation and the Cuban nation-building project were complicated but by the proximity of the pale and avaricious "Giant to the North," which he knew cast Latin America countries as racially degenerate and undesirable. In the United States, Martí would find himself defending the masculinity of Cuban men from charges of moral and racial degeneracy for North American newspaper audiences. In those letters, Martí described the Cuban wars of independence in epic, brutal terms that rescued the manly honor of Cubans. In their "natural" love for mother Cuba, "poorly built" mulattos, delicate city-bred young men, "pampered" aristocrats and "dandies" became strong warriors and brothers by virtue of shared suffering in Cuba's forests and battlefields.

On March 21, 1889, the New York Evening Post published an article entitled "A Protectionist View of Cuban Annexation." The article included excerpts from an article in the Philadelphia Manufacturer objecting to the prospect of admitting Cuba to the Union based on grounds that Cuban men were unfit for self-government because of their racially

"mongrel" and effeminate nature. The Manufacturer article, reprinted in the New York Evening Post, charged that Cuban men "are helpless, idle, of defective morals and unfitted by nature . . . to discharging the obligations of citizenship in a great and free republic. Their lack of manly force . . . is demonstrated by the supineness with which they have so long submitted to Spanish oppression" (The Latino Reader 262).

A few days later, Martí responded to the article with a letter to the editor entitled "A Vindication of Cuba," which the New York Evening Post published on March 25, 1889. In that letter, Martí argued that no self respecting Cuban would wish to be annexed to a country in which the "leaders of opinion share toward him prejudices excusable only to vulgar jingoism or rampant ignorance" (The Latino Reader 207). He defended his countrymen as able, intelligent, hardworking and not given to vice, that is, morally upright. He argued that Cuban men arrived in the United States with very little wealth, "unaided by help in kindred language . . . or community of religion" (209). They were, he argued, soon engaged in honorable professions as scientists, engineers, physicians and surveyors. Here, Martí pointed to deeply technical enterprises rooted in positivist sensibilities as a mark of Cuban masculinity. In New York, he reminds his readers, Cuban men worked as "directors of important banks, substantial merchants, popular brokers, physicians with large practices, engineers of worldwide repute, electricians" and of course, journalists (210). He then combined the idea of modern technical men with strong laboring men, stressing that these modern Cuban men, along with working class Cubans, built thriving, industrious, productive communities in Tampa and Key West where formerly there had been a few decidedly un-modern "huts on a barren cliff" (208).

In his letter, Martí also described the Cuban War of Independence in epic, heroic terms, reclaiming the manhood of Cuban men in the language of nature. "We have

suffered impatiently under tyranny; we have fought like men, sometimes like giants, to be free men" (208). Martí reminded his readers that Cuban *mambis* voluntarily abandoned comfort and wealth, freed their slaves, lived in rough camps and kept "at bay in 10 years of such a life, a powerful enemy, with a loss to him of 220,000 men, at the hands of a small army of patriots, with no help but Nature!" (211). Here Martí locates men determined to join the modern brotherhood of nations in the raw, untamed natural world.

In his letter to the New York Evening Post, Martí assumes that charges of effeminacy stem not only from failure of the first war of independence, but also from the relatively small physical stature of Cuban men. In Philadelphia, Martí charges, the author who accused Cubans of being "moral pigmies," could observe Cubans of "heroic history and powerful build" who lived in comfort by the profits of their work (210). Martí, however, admits that Cuba's mulattos, like its "city-bred young men" are "generally of delicate physique" (209). But Martí convincingly rescues the masculinity of Cuba's "poorly built" mulattos along with masculinity of city-bred young men--men like himself who sacrificed status and comfort in their devotion to Cuba's freedom. Martí argued that the author of the Philadelphia article mistakes the "suave courtesy and ready words" of Cuba's city-bred young men with unmanliness. He then asserts that "hiding under the glove [and] the hand that polishes the poem" rests the "hand that fells the foe" (209). Martí, a poet in delicate health since his days of forced labor in a Spanish rock quarry, would fail as a soldier, dying in battle at the beginning of the last war of independence, on May 17, 1895.

In his letter to the Evening Post, Martí links the mulattos and city-bred young men in the imagery of guerilla warfare. "These city-bred young men and poorly build half-breeds knew in one day how to rise against a cruel government . . . to sleep in mud, eat

roots, fight ten years without salary" (209). In his passion, he defends the manly Cuban capacity to act with more energy than perhaps was judicious, particularly in light of North American claims about the barbarity of their darker neighbors to the south. "These men of eighteen, these heirs to wealthy estates, these dusky striplings" died alongside "those other men of ours" who with "the stroke of a machete can send a head flying" (209).

Martí does not elaborate on the identity of "those other men" who possessed such strength except to say that they were also able to bring a bull down with the mere turn of their hands. Perhaps Martí had in mind the rural inhabitants of Cuba's countryside, who indeed, often worked cattle and who joined the insurrection in significant numbers, particularly in the eastern provinces. Perhaps he meant black Cubans, who Martí described elsewhere as the "solid column" of Cuban liberty--vigorous men who were able to stretch themselves to their "full height" for the cause of Cuban freedom ("For All And With the Good of All" 141). Martí, in his characteristically protracted and florid prose, may simply have meant the small-framed mulattos and city-bred men themselves as capable of decapitating a man with a single stroke of the machete. In an 1895 letter written in the camps just before his death, Martí describes the Ten Years War as a sacred cause capable of giving even dandies and aristocrats a "soul-felt burst of strength" which taught them to "lop off the heads of tyranny with a single stroke of the machete" ("To the New York Herald" 226).

In their love for their mother Cuba, rich and poor, black and white, planter and peasant, the Spaniard and the island-born, became brothers by virtue of shared suffering. And in his love for mother Cuba, wandering barefoot in the forests eating little more than

wild roots (like animals), the "pampered" aristocrat, the dandy, the poorly built mulatto and the city bred youth, became naturalized, in a sense, as powerful men of action.

"For Suffering Cuba, the First Word"

By the last months of 1891, Martí ceased most of his journalistic work and devoted himself to cause of Cuban liberation. In November of 1891, he wrote the statutes of the Cuban Revolutionary Party and began mobilizing Cubans in Key West, Tampa and New York for the invasion and uprising. The speeches he gave in those communities appeal to the idea of Cuba itself as a suffering mother who was being raped and who cried to her sons for aid. "Down there is our Cuba, smothered in the arms that crush and corrupt it . . . There she is, calling to us. We can hear her moan; she is being raped and mocked . . . Our dearest mother is being corrupted and torn to pieces!" ("With All" 143). Some of Martí most passionate poems and essays about independence employed images of women as suffering mothers--mother not unlike the ailing and neglected *mestiza* mother.

In 1892, Martí published the first edition of Patria, a journal intended to serve the Cuban and Puerto Rican exile community and the cause of independence. In Patria, Martí employed the image of women as revolutionary mothers, often by drawing examples of heroic women from the Ten Years War. He especially appealed to the image of the aged mother, the "mother who had seen her husband and sons die and who remained faithful to Cuba Libre" to symbolize commitment to the cause and assure Cubans that "they would triumph" (From the House 29). For instance, in the August 1892 edition of Patria, Martí described a reception in Philadelphia, where an old woman still wore next to her heart the badge of a Cuban hero. "Everywhere, with their simple *mantillas* and their lovely gray hair these old women who do not tire of us . . . these widows . . . with the medal of their

dead husbands on their breasts, who follow the flag for which he died . . . How can men tire when women are tireless?" (qtd. in From the House 29). But he would also draw from militant maternal figures of the Ten Years War to spur Cubans to battle in 1895, especially the figure of *mulata* Mariana Grajales Maceo.

Women participated in both wars in substantive ways, both in exile and on the island. In his letter to the New York Evening Post, Martí cited the sacrifice of Cuban women in exile as indicative of the worth of their men. Women of "luxury" arrived in the United States in the "heart of winter . . . the Señora went to work; from a slave owner she became a slave, took a seat behind the counter, curled feathers, gave her soul to duty, withered in work her body" ("Vindication of Cuba" 210). Perhaps more importantly, expatriate women continued to wage war against Spain by organizing nationalist clubs dedicated to raising funds for the struggle and publishing materials exposing Spain's brutal practices to audiences in the United States. The wars "could not have been successful without the proliferation of women's revolutionary clubs" (From the House 24).

On the island, "ladies of rank" joined the rebels in the guerilla camps of the "wild forest" and dressed themselves not in the linens and silks they were accustomed to but in the rough "textures of the woods" ("Vindication of Cuba" 211). There they died, like all Cubans in great numbers. However, Martí's writings, including the founding documents of the Cuban Revolutionary Party, do not "indict social injustices affecting women with the same vehemence as he did the evils of racism, slavery, and the dangers of North American imperialism." Like his contemporaries, he failed to "emphasize women's positions in the new society" (From the House 29). Rather, Martí coded Cuban

sovereignty as a matter of manly honor and rights. Martí made women symbols of national sovereignty, rather than active agents or citizens.

The War of Women

Women were among the first to protest Spanish rule in public ways. In 1807 and again at mid-century, Cuban *criollas* cut their hair short to distinguish themselves from their Spanish counterparts. In doing so, Cuban women aligned "their bodies with national identity" while their men did little "to overthrow 300 years of Spanish rule" ("Militant Heroines" 73). In 1851, Marina Manresa achieved a measure of heroic fame for conspiring to receive troops during the failed Narciso Lopez invasion. She was arrested along with her fiancé and was given the opportunity to save herself by denouncing the cause and her lover, but she refused and was executed. For her supreme fidelity to nation and to her fiancé, she soon became "an example of sacrifice for the next generation of women" who would work to free Cuba from Spain ("Militant Heroines" 74). During the Ten Years War (1868 - 1878), José Martí observed with amazement that Mariana Grajales, the mother of the famed general Antonio Maceo and Maria Carbales, Maceo's wife, dashed into a battlefield to drag a wounded Antonio to safety (From the House 20). Mariana and Maria inspired Martí to remark that it is "easy to be heroes with women such as these" (From the House 20).

In fact, the participation of women in the wars was considerable. Spanish soldiers raided and razed farms and homes in an attempt to starve insurrectionists. As a result, many women were often forced to leave "the protection of their homes" and go "into the *manigua*," where they "took up arms in support of national sovereignty" (From the House). The Spanish also punished women suspected of aided insurgents as they did men--with execution, exile or imprisonment. These tactics forced women from the relative safety of

the "private" sphere and into the *manigua* or guerrilla camps, where they often joined male family members fighting for the cause. For these reasons, the war itself was often referred to as the "War of Women" and the "Family War" (From the House 23). During the Ten Years War, stories and songs about women's suffering for the cause, coded in the language of heroic motherhood, boosted patriotic morale during the wars of insurgency ("Militant Heroines" 73).

Early on in the struggle, women pointed to their considerable participation in an effort to gain inclusion in the emerging nation as full citizens. For instance, in 1869, just one year after the beginning of the Ten Years War, Ana Betancourt addressed the Constitutional Congress--then in the process of selecting governing bodies and writing its principles of self-rule--to press for the inclusion of women's rights in those foundational documents (From the House 22). Betancourt specifically established parallels between the subordinate position of women and men of color, whose participation in the war was predicated on the promise of freedom. "Everyone has been enslaved in Cuba: families, people of color and women. . . . Racial slavery no longer exists. Women [are] today and in wartime . . . their sisters . . . even while [women] are denied their rights" (qtd. in From the House 22).

Though representatives at the congress acknowledged the heroic deeds of women during the war, the assembly refused to consider women's rights in the principles of the new nation. Rather, they argued, women would gain legal representation through their husbands. As after the French revolution, Cuban women would be incorporated in the nation not directly as citizens but only indirectly--through men, as dependant members of the family. Cuban women would have to wait from a while longer from the "dark and tranquil corner of her house . . . for the sublime hour in which a just revolution will break

her yoke" as Betancourt put it. In fact, they would wait until 1934 to be precise, when women finally won the right to vote in Cuba.

The Ten Years War ended in 1878 in a stalemate. The cause then lay largely dormant, divided along class and race lines until the early 1890s, when José Martí helped unite a broad base of Cubans under the banner of the Cuban Revolutionary Party. He traveled widely, meeting with important and often feuding leaders in the previous war, including Antonio Maceo and Máximo Gomez. Indeed, Martí was able to unify most Cubans by calling for an end to racism and calling for a commitment to social justice--a strategy that would successfully spur Cubans to war in 1895.

Both men and women would answer Martí's call for a free and independent Cuba by enlisting in the Liberation Army in large numbers. "Scores of women" served as they had in the Ten Years War, but their roll was "broader and more militant" in the final effort for nationhood (From the House 28). And the price women paid was higher than in the Ten Years War, as the Spanish intensified efforts to starve out insurrectionists by driving rural inhabitants into concentration camps, where disease and starvation proved devastating. Women who had not been motivated by Martí's speeches and writing to join the ranks of the army would now do so given the alternative. Death in battle was preferable to starvation in the camps, where "their lives were as meaningless as their deaths" (From the House 30).

Militant, Merciless Maternity: Mariana Grajales in José Martí

In October of 1893, Martí wrote Mariana Grajales Maceo's obituary and several editorials in Patria, again employing the image of the aged mother who worked tirelessly for a free Cuba to inspire the cause. In her obituary, Martí describes Mariana as a "beloved old woman with a scarf on her head" and as a symbol of duty and respectability

who upheld the hope of the nation with the "affection" of a "mother of heroes" ("Mariana Grajales de Maceo" 617). However, through the figure of the aged mother Mariana, Martí also defined patriotic duty as a kind productive, merciless maternity.

Mariana, a *mulata* of Santiago's considerable free middle class, produced thirteen children (two daughters and eleven sons), including Antonio and José Maceo, the famous generals in the Liberation Army. Moreover, at the onset of the Ten Years War, Mariana, then in her sixties, joined her husband Marcos, her children and daughters-in-law in the *manigua*, where she remained for the duration of the Ten Years War, running Antonio's scamps and infirmaries with a fearlessness that prompted Martí and others to declare her heroic. Nine of her sons (and her husband Marcos) would die in the struggle for independence. Mariana not only produced a great many sons, she produced heroes with revolutionary ideals and military skill. Moreover, she actively sacrificed son after son to the war.

Mariana lived to see abolition, but she died in exile at the age of 85 in 1893, just before the beginning of the final Cuban War of Independence in 1895. In her obituary, Martí first eulogizes Mariana as an example of patriotic duty that others engaged in the continuing struggle might emulate. Martí had recently met with her in Jamaica, where after the Ten Years War, she and her few surviving children sought exile and where her home served as a meeting place for *independistas*. She welcomed Martí as a son and discussed with "unextinguishable fire" not only the "glories" of the previous war and but also "the hope of today," that is, the preparations for the 1895 war.

As Martí left, Mariana walked him to the door and "wrapped him in a look without end" that is, one that stretched into a limitless future. Martí certainly seems to identify with her as an exile, lamenting she died before independence and lay buried a

tomb in "foreign earth" ("Mariana Grajales de Maceo" 617). In her obituary, he inserts her into the narrative of the future nation with stories of her valor. In that way, the life of the "admirable woman" who did not live to see the fatherland might thus give the nation "a new page" for its "epic" ("Mariana Grajales de Maceo" 617).

The image of Mariana Grajales has been employed over the course of more than one hundred years in an astonishing array of political contexts, each stressing or obscuring various aspects of her story--beginning with oral, insurrectionist accounts and Martí's patriotic writing, to official nationalist monuments of the early Republican period and the Cuban socialist government. Precious few scholarly treatments of Mariana, however, exist. Nationalist politicians of the First Republic, like those who made her the official Mother of Cuba in 1957, of course, failed to note the fact that she was a *mulata*. This is not altogether surprising and in fact "mirrored the 'whitening' element present in the treatment of her sons as national heroes" ("Social and Political Motherhood" 307).

But even Martí, who so often addresses national racial consolidation in his work and who took such pains to describe Mariana physically, failed to make mention of the fact that she was *mujer de color*. Rather, in her obituary, he repeatedly mentions the *pañuelo* on her head as a metonymic marker of race. As a statesman and writer engaged in the task of liberation, it's not surprising that he stresses the militaristic aspects of Mariana and her role in the war and obscures the potentially problematic aspect of her race. "The story of Mariana Grajales has become a myth . . . molded to dominant gendered notions of history, in the same way that the Maceo-Grajales story has all too often been subsumed in a version of history that denies race" ("Free Browns" 4).

The myth of Mariana has consistently rendered in the tradition of *marianismo*, that is, in terms of "motherhood that is heroically self-abnegating" ("Social and Political Motherhood" 312).

However, in the obituary written for Patria in December of 1893, Martí alternates between stressing Mariana's role as mother and healer and praising her courage as a *guerrillera* or warrior - at times simultaneously. "Didn't she urge her compatriots to fight and then cure the wounded?" ("Mariana Grajales de Maceo" 617). At times, he describes her as a tireless *independista* in her own right, not just as the mother of independistas. He relates her ferocity and physical stamina, but he is careful to praise her in terms of domesticity and maternal tenderness - her *ternura*. Martí praises her as a "lioness" and warrior, but a warrior with "the loving eyes of a mother" (617).

Certainly, Martí stresses her abilities as a mother. Biographies of Antonio Maceo have tended to attribute the general's valor to Mariana's abilities as a "respectable" wife and mother. She kept a clean, orderly home and raised "well-mannered and well-turned out children. There would be no grubbing around in tatters" (Cortina qtd. in "Social and Political Motherhood" 309). The attention on her clean, disciplined body and clean children, too, resonates with neo-classical images of women in clean, simple Greco-Roman tunics employed in Europe and in Cuba throughout the nineteenth century.

Marianna's ability to raise respectable children sets her apart from the "decadence" of Spanish women, who, like French aristocratic women, were said to be selfish, particularly in the practice of employing wet-nurses. Helen Hitjens notes that "national essence" is often seen as "transmitted in bodily essence" ("Founding Fathers and Earth Mothers" 35). At Mariana's own breast, Martí claims, the great generals, José and Antonio Maceo, were imbued with a love for freedom—a fact that many believed

accounted for their valor. "We all know that at her breast Antonio and José Maceo nursed the qualities that place them at the vanguard of the defenders of our liberties" ("Mariana Granjales de Maceo" 617).

Moreover, her "mother's breast" also represents a site of Cuban unity. In an editorial written for Patria in January of 1894, Martí notes that many Cubans wrote letters to the journal about Mariana's death filled with "emotion" for her. Martí wonders what qualities existed in her simple life that might inspire so many to write about her with the "tenderness of her children." He determines that mysterious and "holy" qualities resided in her "mother's breast" that reveal the national soul. "Only the unity of the Cuban soul, made in war, can explain this tenderness and respect" ("La Madre de los Maceo" 618). In a sense, her mother's breast acts, like the bloody battlefield itself, as a site which produces unity among Cuban men, brothers united through blood and breast milk.

In the same letter, Martí locates her in history at the moment of her death—serene and surrounded by her progeny. "She so remains in history, smiling at the end of her life" (618). However, he then decides it better to "paint" her as a warrior—celebrated for her fierce determination, her lack of sentimentality and her willingness to sacrifice her children. Carol Pateman points out that a woman's primary responsibility as a demi-citizen lies in her reproductive capacities. "Men's duty to die for the state is matched by women's duty to give birth for the state" (The Disorder of Women 11). As a prolific mother who raised a "heroic tribe" that she was more than willing to sacrifice, Mariana does both. Martí recounts the day they brought her son, Antonio Maceo, shot in the chest and wearing the color of death. "All the women were crying . . . and the mother, with her kerchief on her head, tossed them all out like she scattered chickens." In the oft-repeated account, Mariana shouted "Out! Out, you skirts. I won't stand for tears!" She throws the

other women out of the hut, deriding them as "skirts." Mariana then calls for her youngest son Marcos, a mere boy at the time, shouting: "And you! Prepare yourself because now it is time to fight in his place!" ("La Madre de los Maceo" 618). She simply replaces one son on the battlefield with another, fulfilling her requirement to the nation to produce children and then sacrifices them--more actively than most--at the altar of the emerging Republic.

Mariana renounced a comfortable existence to spend ten years in the forests running guerrilla camps under tremendous privation. She apparently had a considerable knowledge of herbal healing and a penchant for strategy, and she worked for a vision of a free Cuba for over forty years. The complicated position she held as *guerrillera* and healer in life, however, in death becomes subsumed to her role as Mother. For her willingness to sacrifice herself and her children, she is celebrated today as the Mother of Cuba. "On the wreath for the tomb of Mariana Maceo, inscribe one word--Mother!" ("Mariana Grajales de Maceo" 617).

Again, Exile

Unlike the nineteenth-century Cuban communities in the United States, the post-1959 Cuban exile community in the United States, displaced by a socialist revolution, was characterized by conservative contours. In its desire to preserve Cuban culture, the Miami exiles (re)created a distinctly reactionary and conservative community with rigid gender definitions. The "mirror image of a Havana" they recreated was one "they believe existed before Fidel Castro and his minions did away with the things they . . . held dear" (Monteagudo, "Miami, Florida" 778). As Arguelles and Rich put it: "insecurity about status both personal and collective, seems to have led to an increase in cultural conservatism . . . these factors tended to reify aspects of the traditional Cuban sexual

ideology: patriarchal dominance and rigid gender definitions" ("Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Revolution" 122).

As during the wars for independence, post-1959 Cuban exile *periodicos* continued to symbolize Cuba as a suffering mother, often a mother in chains, while excluding women from the political realm. For example, the banner of the November 1963 *periodico Ideal* reads "Cuba: Woman and Mother." Another issue features a full-page image of mother and child and reads, "Gracias a Dios por las madres" (Thank God for mothers). Still another proclaims: "Tan grande es ser madre que hasta Dios quiso tener una." (Mothers are so great, that even God wanted one). *Ideal* also tended to feature countless photos of fat, pretty babies, often next to articles on the paramilitary group, Alpha 66, with captions expressing the hope of regaining Cuba in the future. One butterball proclaims, "Yo creo en el futuro, y tu?" (I believe in the future, and you?). Motherhood, in this particular context, supports and reproduces a particular exile project, that is, the hope of "reclaiming" Cuba.

Motherhood symbolized the cause, but women were generally excluded from the "male domain" of exile politics and organizations, where "tradition cast them in a marginal and supportive role" (*Havana USA* 133). Cuba exile politics has typically rendered women absent, invisible, silent—a fact that has not gone unnoticed by Cuban-American writers (*Havana USA* 137). In *La Montaña Rusa*, for instance, a radio host "advises women not to become involved in the 'masculine' forum of politics. Only in an unavoidable situation might you murmur 'Yes, communism smells like poop'" (*Havana USA* 190). As Ruth Behar points out, even the word *exilio* is a male noun. "Curiously too, most writing about . . . exile is done by men" (*Bridges to Cuba* 13).

Exile groups, particularly those with paramilitary dimensions, excluded women from their organizations as a matter of policy and limited the involvement of women in propaganda organizations considered "sensitive" to operations. Even the suffering of female political prisoners in Cuba received almost no attention in the exile press, although the *periodicos* devoted endless ink to the suffering of Cuban *plantados*. "It was not until the late 1980s that the women's experience even began to be told in the exile press in Miami" (Havana USA 135).

In exile groups, women tended to perform auxiliary services like cooking or the "thankless and tedious work of sewing or painting banners." As one woman put it: "The men did all the planning . . . but we always did all the work" (Havana USA 134). Moreover, like Martí's "señora who went to work," women who arrived in the United States after the 1959 revolution worked in significant numbers outside the home. They were typically taxed by the dual burdens of working outside the home and assuming complete responsibilities for household work, the care of children and the aged without domestic help, often for the first time in their lives. This "double duty" generally left little time for involvement in groups organizing for a "free" Cuba. If their men could devote themselves to the cause, it was often because their women assumed a disproportionate burden of work (Havana USA 133 -134).

In many ways, the work of Gustavo Pérez Firmat is illustrative of the exile-imagined nation. To a startling degree, his writing persists in the tendency to located Cuban exile identity at the site women's bodies, but he defines nationhood and citizenship in acutely masculine terms. The constellation of attitudes Pérez Firmat posits as characteristic of the Cuban American culture are gendered in specific terms - marked by rage and the loss of male privilege. He relies of maternal and matrimonial metaphors to

sort out ideas of Cuban and Cuban American identity. Like Martí, Pérez Firmat employs the image of the old woman as a durable symbol of Cuba. However, Pérez-Firmat also employs old women to symbolize his loss of power and masculine privilege in socialist Cuba.

In Next Year in Cuba, Pérez Firmat recreates Cuba specifically in terms of memory--in a timeless space--and projects onto that space fantasies of national identity and of reclamation--a triumphant return to Cuba. His Next Year in Cuba reaffirms a sense of Cuban exile nationalist identity firmly rooted in a reactionary politics that constructs Cuba in staggeringly a-historical and troubling terms. Pérez-Firmat's work is marked by pervasive sense of nostalgia that seems to function outside of history, employing a disturbing sort of erasure and recreating the island to produces a strange, frozen and quintessentially exilic *Cuba de ayer*. Moreover, Pérez-Firmat claims Cuba for "real" Cubans, that is, those who left after the revolution. His work re-writes history by neatly evading or amputating (to use his own term) several centuries of unequal power relations between Cuba and the U.S. and continues in the vein of earlier Cuban exile literature, particularly in its Castro fixation and in its attempt to preserve a set of "traditional" Cuban values.

In writing his recollections, Pérez Firmat insists that he cannot remember much of his childhood in Cuba and describes that inability to remember in terms of dismemberment--a metaphoric castration. "Refugees are amputees. Someone who goes into exile abandons not just his possessions, but a part of himself" (Next Year 22). Moreover, he has jettisoned or repressed his memories in the crossing and employs the language of mutilation to describe his forgetting. "I sliced my life in half and threw away the bitter half." He also describes his amnesia in the politically charged terms of the

embargo. "The Florida Straits . . . have been an unbridgeable chasm, impassable even in memory . . . I have placed an embargo on my Cuban memories" (Next Year 34 - 35). For Gustavo, leaving represents a splitting of the self and the abandonment of his boyhood self. That childhood self remains, forever a boy, frozen in time. But the Cuban boy he had been continues to haunt the man he would become. "He is my phantom limb . . . I see him waving to me and I want to wring his neck" (Next Year 21 - 23). Cuban American writers like Pérez Firmat who see the past as existing behind unapproachable "enemy lines" plumb their memories in an attempt to reconcile their sense of dislocation. He persists in the Cold War constructions of national identity that forever sever him in two. His childhood remains in a political limbo, unapproachable, dismembered and in conflict with his adult self.

As a result, Pérez Firmat, whose work is often complex, humorous, and sophisticated, typically resorts to static, binary and essentialist categories of identity rooted in Cold War constructions of nation. In Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban American Way, he examines Cuba and Cuban identity as "less a place on a map" than a series of unstable signifiers. Here he employs the language of border studies to theorize the constructed and unstable nature of Cuban and Cuban American identity. "I do not claim for Cuban America a fixed habitation . . . for I am fully and painfully aware that in this era of mobile homes and shifting borders, one's sense of place is provisional at best. Like other borders, those of Cuban America are makeshift and moveable" (15).

However, in Next Year in Cuba, written one year later, Pérez Firmat retreats to highly essentialist notions of national identity--notions that define Cuban and Cuban American identity in highly static, binary and gendered terms. In Next Year in Cuba, Pérez Firmat recalls his Cuban childhood in an attempt to unify his adult sense of a split

self. "This isn't a memoir, for the past is not my destination. Rather than memorious, I intend to be recollective, in both senses of the word: my purpose is not simply to recall the past . . . I write to recollect myself, to shape disparate fragments into a portrait that I can easily recognize and embody" (Next Year 13).

Ultimately, he mines his memories in an attempt to create a coherent sense of self from Cold-War categories of national identity, drawing sharp ontological distinctions between his Cuban self (the boy) and his Cuban American self (the man). As a result, he fixes and flattens the indeterminate nature of cultural and personal identity. Pérez Firmat at times foregrounds the unstable nature of identity by employing the language of border studies to describe his "Cuban America." But more often than not, he writes to preserve a "dying" way of life. He claims: "I sketch the contours of Cuban America in the hope of keeping my country on the map a little longer" (Next Year 19). "Beneath or beyond the panoply of my national loyalties and cultural allegiances, something and someone persists. I write to grasp and hold that unchanging core" (Next Year 8). Sadly, that unchanging core remains as rooted in the rigid gendered and racial categories of identity as those of *la Cuba de ayer*.

In refusing to acknowledge the island's existence, in imagining Cuba only in particular anti-Castro terms, Pérez Firmat's work approximates the language of a powerful right-wing exile lobby, which like him, would keep a fictitious *Cuba de ayer* alive in the imagination and only the imagination. In fact, the exile lobby has managed to restrict travel to the island for over forty years, blacklisting and harassing artists who travel to Cuba. Unfortunately, Pérez Firmat's work reflects the repressive political and intellectual climate of the exile community, a condition that compromises genuine artistic expression and investigation and in which "intellectuals who are obviously capable of

subtle and profound criticism" instead must "limit themselves to speaking in ways that Miami rewards" (Camara, "Third Options" 221).

Imagining Exile or The Masculine Birth of Time

If immigration is an accelerated birth, exile is a state of suspended animation that looks every bit like a slow death. For the exile, every day is delay, every day is deferral. — Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, Next Year in Cuba

Nations, as Benedict Anderson writes, "always loom out of the immemorial past" and "glide into a limitless future" (qtd. in Narrating the Nation 1). Certainly, Martí drew from the historical past, often along with the heroic dead, to project the birth of the Cuban nation into a glorious future. "In this sublime task . . . the dead are counseling and commanding, and the living are listening and obeying; and in the wind there are sounds of flags unfurling! Let us band together, Cubans, in this other faith" ("With All" 136). Similarly, Pérez Firmat, like many exile writers, locates the "real" Cuba in a grand past and a triumphant future—a future without Castro, when the dead and the living dead will shake off their shrouds and everything will return to its proper place. The very title of Pérez Firmat's book, Next Year in Cuba, a wistful toast offered at New Year's eve which echoes Jewish Passover invocation and refers to the future restoration of the Temple—an event that will explode history and propel the Jews into a glorious messianic future (past).

As with Martí, in Firmat's work, the dead participate in the imagined nation. Pérez Firmat describes the early exile years as anxiety-ridden—as a prolonged death-bed vigil. In Miami, exiles waited as if for the Second Coming. "We spent our days in a mode of crisis . . . Like zealots on the eve of the millennium, Cuban exiles were certain that something was going to happen to Fidel at any moment . . . Miami was like an Irish wake, with the same mixture of festiveness and grief, but with the difference that we expected the corpse to come back at any moment (Next Year in Cuba 75). This false state

of crisis or emergency, not unlike the state described in Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (257), mirrors, ironically, the perpetual state of readiness Cuban nationals exist in on the island. Castro effectively employs the threat of imminent invasion to keep the island in a state of perpetual emergency. "*Siempre listo para el combate.*"

When the anticipated fall of Castro failed to materialized and the "abortive" Bay of Pigs Invasion ended the possibility of American intervention, Miami seemed to settle into a period of despair. Pérez Firmat describes this second stage as a kind of living death--a "state of suspended animation that looks every bit like a slow death" (Next Year 122). But in the early 1990s, the collapse of the Soviet Union once again seemed to spell the end of the Cuban revolutionary government. The Cuban exile community once again allowed itself to dream of reclaiming Cuba--a hope Pérez Firmat indulges in as well. "The USSR has disintegrated . . . and Cuban exiles are in a frenzy" (Next Year 2). The dead and the dispossessed are shaking off their shrouds. "The exile dead are turning in their graves, the living are turning in their American passports" (Next Year 2).

In this section, Pérez Firmat describes a Willie Chirino concert at the Miami Dade Auditorium, a favorite venue of Cuban-exile artists, to illustrate the renewed nature of exile hopes. The passage reveals the constructed nature of the Cuban nation--a portable set of signifiers enacted in deferred time and borrowed space. The Miami-Dade auditorium is threadbare and aging, but the "cavernous," that is, womblike auditorium "remains a magical place, a house of dreams. In the early years . . . Cuban artists often put on shows here with titles like 'Cuba Sings and Dances' or 'Havana Memories.' These performances, which always ended with the impassioned singing of the Cuban national anthem, a battle hymn that felt more like a prayer, transported us back to Cuba, if only in

our imaginations" (Next Year 3). The auditorium seems to exist outside time and its performances are politically charged with national rhetoric--battle hymns and prayers--and a national longing for a triumphant return to the past in some imagined future.

During this particular concert, Chirino sings "Nuestro día ya va llegando" (Our Day is Already Arriving), which confidently forecasts an end to Castro's thirty-year dictatorship. "One by one, Chirino names the Soviet bloc countries which have gained independence, and Nicaragua. When he calls out Cuba, the crowd goes mad. Believe me, a couple of thousand Cubans . . . all screaming at the top of their lungs can make a lot of noise. But this isn't just noise--it's a cry, a plea, a lament, an ejaculation" (Next Year 5). By employing the language of "consummation," Pérez Firmat projects the hope of reclaiming Cuba into the future--a masculine birth of sorts devoid of maternal bodies.

Like many Cuban exile writers, Pérez Firmat at times seems reasonably convinced Castro will fall any day now and entertains notions of regaining his family's wealth and status, though he recognizes that the island will have changed. "Perhaps I would go back after all. I'd certainly like to get back what was taken from us, as much for the principle as the money" (Next Year 98). The very title of his book, Next Year in Cuba, echoes the exile fantasy of retaking the island like the holy land, a hope that has, over the years, grown more dim and has been reduced to the sadly delusional, drunken New Year's toast heard around Miami each *Año Nuevo*.

This fantasy of return ignores the existence of Cuban nationals who hardly seem willing to give up the homes and communities they have built with much effort over the last forty years. But Pérez Firmat claims Cuba for "real" Cubans, that is, those who left after the revolution. He relegates contemporary Cuba and contemporary Cubans to a space of memory, reducing the island's decades of socialist history to little more than a

phantasm, a dream, a "long historical nightmare" (Next Year 9). Pérez Firmat refuses to recognize the island and its inhabitants and participates in the exile community's banishment of the island and Cuban nationals who chose to remain behind rather than leave their homeland--a peculiar denial in which, as Behar puts it, The United States has "erased Cuba from our map of the world" (Bridges to Cuba 2).

Pérez Firmat participates in erasing the island, refusing to recognize the contemporary island-nation, except in particular anti-Castro terms. For exiles, Cuba is a place to remember or re-conquer, but never ever acknowledge as an equal with a right to self-determination. "I have refused to go back not just because I don't want to help Fidel with my dollars, but primarily because I'd find it intolerable to visit places that belonged to us . . . (Next Year 36). Here he employs the figure of old women remembered from childhood to symbolize loss of privilege in revolutionary Cuba. Gustavo sees the possibility of returning merely to visit, rather than to reclaim the island, as emasculating--an act which would make an old woman of him. "This kind of *regreso* is not for me. It feels too much like crawling. It reminds me too much of when, as a child, I used to see some old women ascend the stairs of San Agustín Church on their knees" (Next Year 37). Martí employed images of old women to symbolize resilience and loyalty to the cause of a free Cuba. But Pérez Firmat's image of "some old women" in this passage represents weakness, lack of dignity, perhaps backwardness and superstition.

Rather, Pérez Firmat fantasizes about returning in the near-future, victorious and erect, to reclaim his wealth at the expense of those who stayed behind--a prospect with terrifying implications. Like powerful right-wing exile lobby groups, Pérez Firmat not only refuses to recognize the contemporary island's right to self-determination, but he also conveniently ignores the existence of Cuban nationals, who he imagines removing

from his house in Havana. Pérez Firmat does not discuss the contemporary island except in terms of the "welcome demise of the Cuban Revolution" (Life on the Hyphen 19). He largely ignores the fact that the island has gone on despite the exile community's efforts. More frightening still, exile organizations seem to have every intention of returning the island to a pre-revolutionary condition in which they enjoyed considerable privilege. They have plans to "weed out from Cuban polity" those Cubans who participated in the revolution, a prospect which has not been lost on those living on the island (Behar, Bridges 2). Cuban nationals, however, are not likely to submit to the return of the exiles without a fight. And as history has shown us, wars between family members are bloody, indeed.

Milicianos, Memory and Dismemberment

I write about the marriage of person and place. And exile is someone for whom this marriage is broken up. --- Gustavo Pérez Firmat, Jr., Next Year in Cuba

In Next Year in Cuba, Pérez Firmat locates the island in a future past—that is, a future in which the "real" Cuba of yesterday will be restored. But his text also locates Cuban American identity in the space of memory—in his childhood in Cuba and adolescence in Miami. In fact, his nostalgic text explores identity specifically in terms of psycho-sexual development, often the context of nuclear, familial relationships and marriage and in the classic formulation of descent and consent. But the book also focuses on sexualized relationships outside the legitimate sphere. Next Year in Cuba is subtitled A Cubano's Coming of Age in America, and the book is, in fact, a memoir of a young man reaching sexual maturity, complete with sexual conquests. The memoir explores the split between the Cuban-boy (abandoned in Cuba) and the Cuban American man he would become in the United States. He employs the language of dismemberment,

emasculatation and the recovery of masculinity through access to women's bodies--both *mulata* and North American.

The revolution arrived when Gustavo was 12 years old, that is, on the cusp of adolescence--that twilight stage between boyhood and manhood, "when my hormones were beginning to churn and my fantasies were swerving away from cowboys and toys" (Next Year 42). The revolution interferes with the closeness he imagines he would have felt with his father had they remained in Cuba. It also interrupts the process of claiming the masculine privilege that would have soon been his as Gustavo, Jr., as the eldest son in a wealthy white family. In Havana, his family enjoyed living in a "grand Cuban style" complete with "big houses, big cars, a big yacht, big jewelry, big furs, big cigars" and many servants. Those servants included an obliging and sexually available *mulata* maid who let little Gustavo look up her skirts (Next Year 27). Had it not been for the revolution, he would have continued growing up in Old Havana, and he and his father would have "know the same people" and "frequented the same bars and brothels" (Next Year 106).

Instead, the revolution arrives and interrupts the process of claiming the male privilege that was already beginning to be his. In Western, industrialized societies, boy children, are, at some point, turned over to men to be "purged" of mother's influence and to achieve full manhood. "Women perform lower-order conversion from nature to culture, but . . . the higher level is restricted to men" (Ortner, Disorder of Women 34). If women transformed the "raw natural resources into cultural products," then a twelve-year-old Gustavo might be considered nearly baked--no longer a child and already beginning to assume a place of privilege alongside his father.

However, the revolution returned him to the home, his mother's sphere, where he once again became a coddled and confined *niño de la casa*. Gustavo spent his several years in Cuba after the Revolution almost entirely behind closed doors. His parents did not allow him to watch Fidel on T.V. or collect bullets, badges or other military memorabilia like other boys. His mother, Nena, actively interfered with his attempts to identify with these rough, bearded revolutionary men. "One night when we were riding home in my mother's Lincoln, we were stopped by a *miliciano* who demanded a ride" (Next Year 29) The soldier sat between Gustavo and his brother, smelling of "sweat and gunpowder," and he offered to give the boys bullets as a souvenir. "To my disappointment, Nena instantly intervened, declining on our behalf. We rode silently the rest of the way" (Next Year 29).

Eventually, Gustavo learns to resent the *milicianos*, not only because they help his mother reassert her control over him, but because they usurp his position of privilege--a privilege that had already entitled him to look up his maid's skirts. Before the revolution, when Gustavo was 11 or so, his maid Anselia was picking mangoes up in a tree and she allowed little Gustavo looking to look up her dress because it was "good for him" (Next Year 43). Now the *milicianos* lounged "defiantly" on the stairs leading to Gustavo's grand house, cleaning their guns, demanding to be fed. More importantly, they "flirted with the maids," a fact Gustavo, Jr. seems particularly enraged by. Indeed, the maids, who had hitherto indulged him, were now "enthralled by these young bearded men who had just come down from the mountains" (Next Year 30).

Gustavo and his family soon leave the island, an act that represents a complete loss of power for his father--emasculatation. In fact, for Gustavo Sr., impotence becomes his "metaphor for exile" (Next Year 108). He lost his nation and so lost his erection.

"Joking about his lack of virility . . . may be his way of expressing the abiding feelings of powerlessness that overtook him when the *almacen* was confiscated and he had to leave the country" (*Next Year* 108). Exile diminished his father, who seems almost absent, invisible, a ghostly double of a man who was once a millionaire. "The Revolution cost many people many things; sometimes I think it cost me my father" (*Next Year* 116).

Impotence is Gustavo Sr.'s metaphor for the emasculation of exile. Hyper-sexuality and a focus on the erect penis, however, define Gustavo's response to the dismemberment of dispossession. For Gustavo, Jr. *empingue* best describes exile. "A *pinga* . . . is a prick--not a penis, not a phallus . . . but a prick. When you're *empingado*, totally and irremediably pissed off, its as if you become engorged with rage, as if you yourself turned into a stiff, throbbing prick of fury" (*Next Year* 124). His work is marked by rage and a sense of powerlessness, which he mediates with asserting his authority over women.

Big Mothers, Mean Mothers

Pérez Firmat often examines Cuban American identity in terms of nuclear, familial relationships. In *Foundational Fictions*, Doris Sommer notes that nations are built in the language of love and family. "This natural and familial grounding, along with the language of productive sexuality, provides a model for . . . national consolidation" (76). For emerging, long-established, and I would add exilic nations, the "naturalness" of gender relations functions as a "framework narrative . . . for the naturalness of other unequal power relations" (76). Pérez Firmat employs metaphors of maternity and marriage, emasculation and hyper-heterosexuality to reclaim a position of male privilege.

While the country--the land, the untamed and formless wilderness--is often configured as female, nations and nationhood--are written as male. As Pérez Firmat

writes, one may begin one's life in the "womb" of a "country" (Next Year 244). However, national identity apparently requires a phallus. For instance, Pérez-Firmat's pondering the complexities of Cuban American identity posits that "the place where you beat off for the first time, where you spill your first seed, determines your nationality" (Next Year 99). Nationality, it seems, requires semen.

Pérez Firmat goes to great length to explore the problems of identity for himself and his father, his brothers, his son. But he excludes his mother, daughter, and Cuban wife from his discussions of national identity. It simply becomes a non-issue, as if women--the keepers of the culture--dwell only within the realm of the domestic, unaffected by the "public" concerns. Exile devastates Pérez Firmat's father--emasculates him. However, according to Pérez Firmat, his mother, Nena, only complains about exile "when something goes wrong with the family" (Next Year 165). His eight-year old son David understands "that since his father and his father's father are Cuban, without Cuba he would be an incomplete man. Thus he calls himself *machito* and tries to strut" (Next Year 257).

But like Nena, Pérez Firmat's daughter, Miriam, apparently has no need for national identity. She "does not need to flaunt her search for roots in order to find out who she is . . . she leads her life within the realm of the practical" (Next Year 259). Miriam may ask questions about Cuba, but only from her "interest in others rather than from her involvement with herself. Miriam doesn't need Cuba, but she realizes that others of us do" (Next Year 259). Her national and cultural identity exists only in relation to her father and brother--subsumed under male family members.

In Pérez Firmat's work mothers act as the keepers of culture. In the United States, Cuban women "swaddle" children born even "in the most American hospital in the most

American city" in Cuban sounds, language, and habits (Next Year 244). But if Pérez Firmat's father seems absent and emasculated, his mothers seem omnipresent and enormous. Like Martí's Mariana, Pérez Firmat's mothers are formidable. In Pérez Firmat, that ferocity, however, is not directed against political enemies. It is, instead, unleashed against Cuban men themselves. In "My Life as a Redneck," Pérez Firmat employs the language of castration anxiety, characterizing Cuba as a "feeble" phallus "awash in an endless mothering ocean" ("Redneck" 224). The mothering ocean threatens to drown the island in her "effluvia" (225) or administer "spankings" (224). Cuban men, like the island, are also "surrounded by mothers on all sides. Big mothers. Mean mothers" (223). These big, mean mothers unleash hurricane-force fury on their recalcitrant men, reducing them to so much flotsam. Pérez Firmat asserts that, despite their economic and political subordination, Cuban women really have all the power. Apparently, one of Pérez Firmat's uncles regularly throws himself at his wife's feet to beg her forgiveness every time he cheats on her. "She always does. She's a real mother" ("Redneck" 231).

Martí employs the figure of the aged mother to represent tireless devotion to the free and just Cuba. Pérez Firmat, too, employs the figure of the aged mother, his grandmother Constantina, to represent a particular "timeless" vision of Cuba—a Cuba that sidesteps the revolution by remaining rooted in an Old World past and practices. Despite 20 years of living in Miami, Constantina, who never learned a word of "*inglis*," continued to deep fry everything, typically in lard and olive oil. "Going to her house at lunchtime was like living in Cuba again" (Next Year 146). Linguistically and again through her cooking, Constantina remains untouched by time or place.

Gustavo's maternal grandmother, Abuela Martínez, indulged little Gustavo in the usual tender ways. Abuela Constantina, however, did not particularly like children. In

Cuba, Gustavo saw her only once a week, although she lived next door, and then only to conduct a businesslike transaction--to show her his weekly report card and collect his allowance. Instead, Gustavo's relationship with his paternal grandmother Constantina begins when Gustavo has reached adulthood--when he begins college at the University of Miami and becomes a regular at her house at lunchtime. He describes the relationship in the language of romance and consent, that is, an adult "partnership" that lasted until Gustavo got married and moved away to graduate school (Next Year 145). "One thing that made the romance possible is that she liked men better than boys. As a young man in Miami, I was far more interesting than I had been as a little boy in Cuba" (Next Year 150).

Many Cuban and Cuban American authors employ the figure of the grandmother as figure capable of uniting Cubans on both sides of the Straits. According to Rene Vazquez Diaz, what unites Cubans inside and outside the island is that "our grandmother is the same" (qtd. in Behar, Bridges 15). Pérez Firmat, however, claims his grandmother for exile as his own, oddly enough, in romantic terms. "We were certainly an odd couple, unlikely lovers thrown together by exile. Ours was the ultimate May-December romance, an affair of the heart and the intestines" (Next Year 150).

Like Martí's militant mother Mariana, Constantina is fearsome. Like the maternal Cuban ocean, her ferocity is directed against family members in the private sphere. It is, however, also directed against public city officials, whom she bribes and browbeats into submission. In fact, Pérez Firmat describes her, not without obvious pride and a hint of reverence bordering on terror, as "capable of ripping your heart out with her tongue" (Next Year 147). "A sweet and gentle soul she was not. With her hooked nose, jutting jaw, and massive body, she was both an immovable object and an irresistible force . . .

(Next Year 147). Like the island itself, his obese grandmother is an "immortal" landmass (144). Her enormous frame, with endless folds of flesh, trembled when she "cackled" or laughed like "big, fat, beautiful hen" (147). She borders on the monstrous, particularly in that she was nearly immobile and given to fits of *neura* or depression, during which she refused to bathe or groom herself.

Moreover, Constantina seemed to have witch-like powers, a detail that marked her as monstrous, indeed. Her depressions were punctuated by periods of intense mania during which she claimed to have visions of the virgin. And Constantina had other "half-witch" abilities, which she used primarily to interfere in Gustavo's love life, predicting the character of his girlfriend and declaring her a *puta* or whore. (Gustavo reports that the girlfriend in question did, in fact, turn out to be something of a *puta*.)

Through Constantina, Pérez Firmat is able to ground his sense of *cubanidad* in a Castilian past—a trope that mirrors early twentieth-century Cuban nationalist discourses of *criollismo*. Abuela Constantina stuffed Gustavo not with hybrid New World Cuban dishes, but rather with classic Spanish dishes like *escabeche* or pickled swordfish, *caldo gallego* or Galician stew and *torrejas*, a supremely Spanish desert. Linguistically, too, Cuba seems to have had little effect on her Spanish roots. Constantina left Spain for Cuba when she was a teenager, but retained her thick Castilian accent. And despite her size, she occasionally favored Spanish dances including *paso dobles* and *jotas*, a Spanish folk dance. "She looked . . . like an overfed canary on a tightrope" (Next Year 142).

Through Constantina, Pérez Firmat stresses a specifically European and specifically working-class or rather rural "peasant" inheritance over his own polite Havana upbringing—again, in keeping with Cuban nationalist tropes that gestured toward white peasants of Spanish descent as "authentic" (white) inhabitants of the island. Abuela

Constantina "kept the old peasant names for many household items" (Next Year 145). She ate with a napkin tucked in the neck of her dress and drank coffee from a saucer—a practice that horrified Gustavo's refined, city-bred mother. In fact, during a particularly nasty fight, Nena insulted Constantina by calling her the daughter of "illiterate peasants." Constantina countered by shouting at Nena that those illiterate peasants "had made it possible for her to drive around Havana in a Lincoln Continental" (Next Year 147). Indeed, Constantina, a woman with an elementary school education descended from illiterate peasants proved an able and ruthless merchant.

Gustavo reports with obvious pride that she was the only woman in the family who worked outside the home. She did not spend time with children, preferring instead to work at the family business, where she counted the money, haggled with customers and suppliers and specialized in bribing officials. Unlike her timid husband, she loved a "good fight" (Next Year 142). She even sued the city, telling the judge that her maiden name was not Mulas (or mules) for nothing. With her stubborn peasant ways and her keen merchantile spirit, Constantina represents Cuba's *gallego* inheritance precisely. (Gallego's were often caricatured as ruthless shopkeepers.)

Despite her fierce tongue and her jealousies, Pérez Firmat describes his grandmother with deep respect and intense love. When last he saw her, he assured her they would see each other in the summer, and she blew him a kiss and "batted her eyes in her typical coquettish way" (Next Year 152). She died in the night, and he experiences her death with a terrific sense of loss of community and a feeling that "exile had maimed us permanently" (152). Through her stories, Constantina provided him with a connection to people and places in Cuba he barely remembered, or who had died long before he was

born. "I experienced her death as a depopulation, as a thinning out of my mental society" (152).

At her funeral, however, he was surprised that her enormous form looked comfortable in its casket. "Her blubbery body had settled in the open casket like rice pudding" (152). As he stood thinking about her, remembering her fierce form counting money at the warehouse or sitting at the table surrounded by plates of food, her voice seemed to come to him, cackling in laughter like the "half-witch" she seemed to be. "I heard her voice say to me 'Don't be sad Gustavo; you know that I am immortal, like the saints'" (152). Like Martí's merciless mother Mariana, Constantina escapes death and takes her place in the eternal sacred.

More importantly, for Pérez Firmat, Constantina's death and burial in Miami mark that city as eternally Cuban, giving him a sad, but sure place of permanence. "Miami is a little Havana not only because of the Cubans who still live there, but because, perhaps primarily because, of those who have died there" (*Next Year* 152). His grandmother lies buried in a cemetery in Miami, surrounded by other Cuban dead as in a small city. And such a city, even if inhabited by bones, is a home nonetheless. Her grave provides Gustavo with a sure abode—a sense of place that will not shift under his feet or require the negotiation of complex, contending bicultural loyalties. "Castro could fall tomorrow, every Cuban in Miami could go back to the island and for me, the city would remain as Cuban as it is today" (152). In that, the fierce old witch may have given Gustavo—whose work reveals a deep desire to find a place of fixed habitation—a strangely suitable, if macabre, gift.

For Martí, too, the heroic dead want permanent graves. Constantina's body remains in exile, surrounded by other exiles. But Martí imagines graves in Cuba as the

site of racial intermingling, a place where the bodies of black and white men, Cuban and Spaniard were buried together as national brothers. In "With All And For the Good of All," Martí defended Cuban blacks and Spanish men like his own father (who desired freedom for Cuba so that his own son would not suffer) as having a legitimate place in the new nation. He then seals his argument with an emotional appeal for mother Cuba, who is being raped and tortured, to urge Cuban fighters to sacrifice themselves in battle. "Enough of mere words! Let us rise up to give graves to the spirits of heroes who roam the world, alone and ashamed. Let us rise up so that someday our children will have graves! And let us place around the star of our new flag this formula of love triumphant: With all and for the good of all." (*Martí Reader* 143 - 144). In both Pérez Firmat and Martí, "home" is where our dead sleep.

"Push Her and She Will Kick" or *Americanas*

Pérez Firmat's work mirrors many of the tropes that Martí employed - through in a different context and for different political purposes. Pérez Firmat, however, goes beyond Martí in imagining biculturated Cuban American identity in terms of North American women's bodies. Pérez Firmat describes his early bi-culturation primarily in terms of a new proximity to North American women. The first American woman he encountered, Mrs. Meyers, his elementary school teacher, represented a silent, stern and inaccessible America. With her "thin lips" and "cold hands," she called his parents in for a conference because little Gustavo refused to recite the pledge of allegiance in the morning. Ultimately, they reached an agreement and his first crisis of national loyalties came to a mutually agreeable conclusion. He found her stern, but diplomatic. Unlike Cuban mothers, he determines that American women will "bring you to your knees but they won't make you grovel" (*Next Year* 14).

Pérez Firmat depicts *americanas*, with the exception of the cold Mrs. Meyers, as "infinitely desirable." In school, he and his friends referred to pretty American girls as *yeguas*--a term he claims was a mark of respect. *Yeguas*, or mares, after all, kick. But *americanas* were mere sport, an exiting, but temporary exercise in "foreign relations." Cuban girls, on the other hand, "demanded and got more respect" (Next Year 17).

Pérez Firmat describes his process of Americanization as beginning with Mrs. Meyers and culminating in his affair with his pretty blond secretary, Mary Anne. "When Mary Anne and I fell in love in 1988, I felt I was entering a fascinating, but in some ways, fearsome new world. Not only was she the first *americana* I had been intimate with, she was the first non-Cuban--male or female--that I had gotten to know in any depth" (Next Year 211). He finds her completely enthralling precisely because she is not Cuban. "Mary Anne didn't speak my language, didn't understand my customs, and--most importantly, didn't share my exile nostalgia . . . our sharp differences ignited a passion I had never felt before" (Next Year 212).

Initially, she helps him deny the passage of time. Mary Anne did not share his nostalgia, but she did help him relive his adolescence and makes up for "everything I had missed as a Cuban exile. As a pony-sized version of the *yeguas* of my highschool days . . . she was the *americanita* of my dreams--twenty years later" (Next Year 212). While he was married to his first wife, a Cuban, "my future was my past, and my past was Cuba" (Next Year 254). But sex with Mary Anne "was a way of intensely living in the present" (Next Year 217). For Pérez Firmat, sleeping with the *americanita* of his adolescent fantasies naturalizes him, offers him the promise of unambiguous American identity, naturalizing him. Indeed, for Pérez Firmat "her body was my country" (Next Year 216).

Pérez Firmat ultimately leaves his wife, who represents Cuba and the past, for Mary Anne—an event he hopes will cut the "umbilical cord from Mami and Miami" (Next Year 217). His parents, of course, are horrified. His father and uncles counsel him to by all means sleep with the *americanita*, but not to abandon his wife (Next Year 215). "By leaving a Cuban woman for an American one" Pérez Firmat was "not only changing spouses" but violating one of the "dogmas of exile" which requires marrying "your own kind" (215). Mary Anne is clearly not "his kind." She marks the border of "us" and "not us," that is, between Cubans and North Americans.

Pérez Firmat also marks North American women as "other," not unlike women of color, as naturally, organically sexual, like animals. In Chapel Hill at a ballgame, surrounded by bra-less "skimpily clad, good-looking *americanas*" he concludes that for American women "sexuality seems to be a simple fact of life. For the Cuban women I grew up with, it's a cultural achievement, as much art as instinct. I'm not sure which attitude I like better" (Next Year 6). In this description, for Cuban women, sex is an artifice, a matter of art or cultivation—a practiced, reserved affair. The sexuality of North American women, like black women, exists in the realm of nature and instinct rather than culture.

Pérez Firmat identifies deeply with North American culture, which he joined through the bodies of white women. American men are another matter—posing a threatening cultural and bodily boundary. In his memoir, he describes a near beating he almost received in high school at the hands of a "horde" of tall, muscle-bound football players or "Charles Atlases." Clearly outnumbered and rather skinny and small (not unlike Martí's city-bred young men), Gustavo imagined that "it would be the Spanish American War all over again" (72). His disaster was averted when a group of American

allies appeared, including a particularly enormous and brutal boy he played sports with in elementary school. As a result, the "Rough Riders" dispersed and "no Cuban blood was spilled that night" (Next Year 73).

Despite his use of metaphors of the Spanish American War to illustrate unequal power relations of Cubans and Americans, Pérez Firmat theorizes that Cuban American culture is characterized "more by continuity than conflict" with the larger Anglo culture (Life on the Hyphen 6). Pérez Firmat sees in the "complimentarity" of his body and Mary Anne's, the complementarity of Cuba and America (Next Year 217). "Cubans have always been hyphenated Americans. Stretched across the Caribbean, Cuba itself looks like a hyphen on the way to becoming a question mark" (Life on the Hyphen 16).

Pérez Firmat posits Cuban culture as continuous with American culture. But he is careful to define Cubans against other Latin American groups and to claim a position of exile privilege over immigrants and ethnics--in no small measure in his ability to gain at least partial claim to white privilege. According to Eliana Rivero, for most U.S. Hispanics, the emergence of bilingual literature "signals. . .an established conscientization of minority status" (Sugarcane Memories 173). However, Pérez Firmat, who identifies as an "exile," is careful to maintain a distinct sense of distance from other U.S. Latinos and other minorities. The work of Pérez Firmat continues in the tradition of Cuban exile writers, who, according to Eliana Rivero, possess a "world vision that ignores or rejects the conditions of marginalization from the mainstream under which the other Hispanic native groups operate" (Sugarcane Memories 165 - 166). Pérez Firmat for instance, admits he dislikes the arrival of other Latin Americans in Miami--Nicaraguans, Salvadoreños, Colombians. He writes of the last days of little Havana and the arrival of other Latinos in Miami with a certain fear.

Once upon a time, we were an upwardly mobile tribe, tight-knit and ambitious. Now things are more complicated, for it's not so clear where the "us" ends and the "them" begins . . . I must confess. I miss the "old" Miami where every Hispanic that you met was certain to be Cuban. Now I can no longer go into a gas station and address the attendant with the familiarity that Cubans habitually use with one another, he might be Nicaraguan . . . these days you have to feel the territory out and act accordingly. (Next Year 88)

Pérez Firmat writes like the last survivor of some medieval plague, writing feverishly to record a way of life, as he believes that with the "death of the old-timers" in Miami, "Cuba is dying too" (Next Year 164) or rather the "real" Cuba composed of the largely white anti-Castro community. "I chronicle the present with the disquieting awareness that it may become a thing of the past. Hence I sketch the contours of Cuban America in the hope of keeping my 'country' on the map a little longer" (Life on the Hyphen 19).

At this point, Cuba is an empty, moveable series of signifiers. Pérez Firmat admits that Cuban America exists primarily in shopping malls, restaurants and discotheques (Life on the Hyphen 14) or for that matter a hyper-real theme-park style restaurant named Bongos in Disney World. But like many exile writers, Pérez Firmat writes to fix the paternalistic values of a dying world. Like older exile writers, he assumes the task of preserving a "traditional" way of life. In doing so, his work has continued to fix Cuban American identity in fixed geopolitical nationalist terms. Pérez Firmat's work, with its peculiar sense of exile consciousness, articulates and defends the exile community's political agenda--its intractable anti-Castro position. In refusing to acknowledge the contemporary island and writing only from "memory" his work maintains a posture that

widens the gulf between Cuban nationals and Cuban expatriates. He defines exile identity in rigid terms that ultimately prove limiting, reductive and potentially dangerous.

Pérez Firmat's work marks a response to a moment of transition, representing a literary effort for Cuban Americans to remain "golden exiles" in a world of *mojados*—a borderland where nothing is fixed, where nothing is sure, where no one is "safe." In contrast, other Cuban American writers have clearly begun to consider themselves as ethnics rather than exiles. Their work rejects the calcified memories and Cold-War categories of identity that characterize Cuban exile and exile-identified Cuban American cultural productions. This process of "establishing themselves in the multicultural U.S. literary scene has just begun to happen" so Cuban American writers continue to struggle, at times unevenly, to "deconstruct a former, proscribed way of being" in order to create in an entirely new discourse of "their vital experience" ("Sugarcane Memories" 180).

In the next chapter, we will see that some Cuban American writers have begun to abandon fixed Cold War constructions of identity and embrace the uncomfortable ambiguity of border-life. Typically marked as "other" in terms of race, gender or politics and marginalized within the exile community, these authors move beyond borders, writing across the Florida Straits, disrupting boundaries on many levels. They find no easy answers, no triumphant reclamation of privilege, but they do manage to forge a viable, complex and dynamic sense of multicultural self. They, too, look to the past to make sense of their history, but do not remain in the nostalgia narrative. Indeed, they defy the exile lobby and return to the island in an effort to uncover the aspects of their personal history lost to the machinations of political and ideological forces.

These Cuban American writers, like Cristina García, Achy Obejas, Ruth Behar, Eliana Rivero, Flavio Rísech, Coco Fusco, and others move beyond the nostalgia

narrative. They face the reality of contemporary Cuba, often by traveling to the forbidden island; as a result, they are able to integrate issues of past and present more easily. In facing their past, they manage to reconcile themselves to a degree, or rather, revel in the irreconcilable nature of identity. As we have seen, "only when we can face the anguish of uprootedness, can we gain access to a past that enriches our present and future, restores the forward movement in developmental time, permits the creative integration of a multicultural identity" (Shapiro Rok, "Finding What Has Been Lost" 87).

These progressive, transgressive authors do not participate in the arrested nostalgia narrative, but instead re-write themselves and history, challenging dying and dangerous structures of thought. They take risks, both in their writing and in the flesh and have helped to herald in a new era of dialogue and perhaps even healing between Cubans on both sides of the Florida Straits. Indeed, many have begun to walk away from the limiting and familiar landscape of Cold War politics, groping toward a dimly lit and hopeful place which requires a new language and which knows nothing of borders. Despite the years of bitterness and separation, they have begun to discover themselves and one another.

CHAPTER 5
BRIDGE BODIES/TRANSATIONAL BODIES

Los libros sirven para cerrar las heridas que las armas abren.¹
-- José Martí

In the mid-1990s, I was offered an opportunity to travel to Cuba for a seminar in Santiago, where I have cousins I'd never met and an aunt I am said to take after. When I called my father in Miami to tell him I was going, he reacted quite violently--shouting at me for the first time in years. He screamed that I had finally gone too far, that my professors had brainwashed me, that I had lost touch with reality. He threatened that if I went to Cuba, he would never speak to me again. I cried myself sick--confused and furious--and canceled the trip.

In my search for an answer to my father's reaction, I discovered a book that helped me stay afloat--Ruth Behar's Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1995.) Through Puentes, I discovered that I was not the only "ingrate" daughter of exiles to desire to travel to the island, nor to meet with similarly heated responses. The works that appears in the anthology helped me to understand my father's anger and my own "treasonous" need to go to Cuba in the context of larger historical and political forces. It helped me see us both more clearly and compassionately.

Behar presents the publication of Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba as the continuation of an earlier bridge-building project--the work of Lourdes Casal. In the early 1970s, Lourdes Casal helped found Areíto, the first (and until Bridges, the only) literary

¹ "Books serve to close wounds that weapons open."

journal to publish the work of young Cubans both on and off the island. The exile press declared the Areito group "communists, spies, drug addicts, and *vendepatrias*" (Havana USA 202). Bombs were placed in the homes or offices of the Areito staff members. Its editors were assaulted on the street. One was murdered by extremists in 1979 (Havana USA 204). Like Areito, Behar's Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba collects the work of Cuban nationals and Cuban Americans – a task still not without considerable risks. Indeed, right-wing Cuban exile groups have continued to use violence to intimidate those Cuban Americans seeking to forge connections with those who have remained on the island.

Behar was spared the worst of similar reactions by an accident of timing. The project began with an editorial and a call for submissions in the New York Times in 1992. In her editorial, Behar argued that "there is a second generation of Cuban Americans who want to go beyond the Castro fixation and create cultural and emotional ties among all Cuban people (Behar "Introduction" 4). Such "audacity" normally would have inspired much hostility in the Miami exile press and radio--a denouncement that often precedes physical attack. But her letter to the editor appeared on the very day when the exile community's attention was fixed elsewhere--on Orestes Lorenzo's daring rescue of a his family in Cuba.²

² Lorenzo, a former Cuban pilot and decorated war hero, defected in the early 1990s. Raul Castro "challenged Orestes masculinity," taunting that if Lorenzo was such a "macho" then he should return to Cuba for his family. Lorenzo flew to Cuba in a borrowed plane, scooped his waiting wife and children up from a highway in Varadero, and flew them safely to the United States (Behar, "Introduction" 4). But shortly after arriving in the U.S., Lorenzo began to urge Cubans in exile to participate in a "Crusade of Love" to deliver medicine, clothes, and food to Cubans on the island. His declaration "tarnished his . . . heroic image within the exile community, and he quickly lost credibility" (Behar, "Introduction" 4).

Orestes short-lived celebration as a hero in the exile community bought Behar a kind of reprieve. Only later did her call for submissions inspire a more muted "flurry" of angry letters including a "sarcastic letter from a Miami Cuban poet" stating: "Tell me, Professor Behar, how you would go about editing a 'Building Bridges' issue focusing on . . . Nazi Germany?" ("Introduction" 3). Historical inaccuracy aside, the barb served a particularly mean-spirited purpose, as Ruth Behar is a Cuban a Jew. Behar concluded that a "poet cruel to history is cruel to poetry," and continued in her call for submissions, which produced excellent results--drawing entries from the island and from Cubans scattered in *el extranjero*. In effect, without being naïve about the failings of their respective societies, the participants in Bridges to Cuba affirm "that it is possible to go beyond the polarizations of Cold War thinking" (Behar, "Introduction" 3, 5)

In this chapter, I examine the work of Cuban American authors who appear in Ruth Behar's Bridges to Cuba/Puentes to Cuba (University of Michigan Press, 1995). This important anthology represents a critical juncture in the production of Cuban American arts and letters - a movement away from Cold War constructions of identity and the development of transnational notions of self, often grounded in post-colonial and feminist theoretical frameworks. Bridges theorizes identity as unfixed, heterogeneous and partial, but in materialist terms committed to liberatory praxis.

Most of the writers Behar collects abandon fixed Cold War construction of identity; they defy geopolitical borders and well as ideological, emotional, familial, racial and gendered boundaries--those internal borders that "balkanize our own images of who we are." In doing so, they "create new identities on the borderlands" (Risech, "Cross-Dressing" 59). Typically marked as "other" in the exile community because of their politics, their gender, their sexuality and/or their color, these authors inhabit multiple margins. Many are

queer, dark-skinned and/or female, a "condition which adds its own marginality" (Rivero, "Fronterisleña: Border Islander" 343). I refer to them collectively as "bridge" writers.

The work of Ruth Behar, Coco Fusco, Flavio Rísech and other bridge writers asks where and how "Cuban-ness" is located in complex ways. If nations are forged on women's bodies, if national identity is constructed as unquestioned heterosexual masculinity, do women and gay men have a nation? How do they claim a "place" in history as public, political selves? The Bridges anthology asks and attempts to work out these very questions. Its authors attempt to locate themselves in the national narrative, actively challenging the unevenly gendered structures of nationalist discourses, particularly fraternal, heterosexual foundational fictions.

In this chapter, I investigate the transgressive, transnational work of those artists and writers who appear in Ruth Behar's Bridges to Cuba. Unlike exile-identified Cuban American authors, who ignore the island except in terms of near-nostalgia narratives or anti-Castro cant, many Bridges/Puentes authors travel to Cuba (the forbidden non-place) and examine the island and their memories of it in ways that challenge the traditional exile nostalgia narrative. They do not look to nostalgia or to the nation to elaborate a sense of Cuban American "exile" identity forged in isolationist terms. Rather, they establish complex and fluid definitions of ethnic Cuban American identity and seek to establish viable, if difficult, connections to Cuba and Cuban nationals--often in the context of collaborative, "corporeal" artistic and scholarly projects.

Bridge writers travel to Cuba in an effort to integrate their past and present and to uncover those aspects of their histories lost to them in the polemic of both revolutionary Cuba and exile Miami. They examine own personal histories in manner not unlike the enterprises of revisionist historians--by exploring those facets of history that have been

traditionally ignored or occluded. Unlike exile-identified Cuban American authors, bridge writers refuse to ignore the lost lizard island. They refuse to pretend the island no longer exists or exists only in the past or the future. They do not dismember themselves. Instead, the authors Behar collects defy geopolitical borders and well as ideological, emotional, familial, racial and gendered boundaries, forging complex "border" identities.

In the introduction to Bridges/Puentes, Behar specifically describes the collection as a transnational "in-between" space. The anthology grew out of the feeling that "there is another map of Cuba" besides the ones drawn by generals and politicians--a map "luminous," flexible and fluid (3). She describes the book as a "meeting place, an open letter," a space with permeable borders or "an imaginary homeland" (5). Underscoring the idealism of her project, she also describes the anthology in the language of possibility, process and impermanence like a "castle in sand" (11). More importantly, she considers the book a forum for dialogue -- a space, "hitherto nonexistent, where we can learn to trust one another . . . and turn walls on their sides so they become bridges" (5).

The idea of a bridge -- conceived of as woman -- provides the central metaphor around which the anthology is conceived. "We should not forget that, in turn-of-the-century Cuban monuments, Independence is often figured as a woman . . . Perhaps the bridge to Cuba, like Independence, is best imagined as a woman" (Behar, "Introduction" 13). The woman-bridge exists in those hopeful in-between spaces outside of nation. The bridge is not a monument, but an act -- unfixed, in process, always unfinished and manifested in daily life. As Behar argues in her introduction, those intellectuals, artists and authors who travel back and forth to Cuba act as "the bridge between the island and the exile" (8). The crossing is itself the bridge--a political act with racial and gendered dimensions.

Behar's collection troubles and complicates the image of woman as silent symbol of the Cuban nation. Unlike turn-of-the-century monuments of Cuban Independence, Behar's bridge does not merely reduce women to the symbolic. Hers is a project that places women at the center of history. Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba has done much to re-write Cuban women into the national and literary record, providing considerable space for their work. Ruth Behar's collection overtly attempts to re-write women into history and into a national and literary narrative dominated by men. Behar's anthology overtly establishes the desire to provide "examples of how women's subtle rereadings of Cuban history and contemporary politics can offer crucial insights" ("Introduction" 12). In a Puentes interview with Iraida Lopez, Cristina García recognizes that "traditional history, the way it has been written, interpreted and recorded, obviates women" ("And There is Only My Imagination" 107). As Behar notes, García Dreaming in Cuban, a fluid and hallucinatory novel applauded on both sides of the Straits intervenes in history and "reinserts women into the Cuban national narrative by giving voice to three generations of women divided by revolution and exile." Behar describes the publication of García's novel not only as a major literary event, but as "major historical event" (Behar, "Introduction" 12). Bridges showcases the work of women on both sides of the Straits prominently and resurrects the texts of ignored Cuban and Cuban American women writers like Lourdes Casal - often in the context of partial, marginalized forms of dialogue and conversation.

Behar's Bridges challenges not only the invisibility of women in the national narrative and literary record, but also the marginalization of "queer" Cubans on both sides of the Straits, often in the language of border studies. For instance, in a Bridges essay, Flavio Risch borrows the term *atravesados* from Gloria Anzaldúa, a radical Chicana lesbian author, to describe those Cuban American writers who act as the bridge to Cuba.

"We are *los atravesados*, for whom crossing the border at once means defiance . . . and reconciliation ("Cross-Dressing" 69). The term *atravesados* appears, of course, in Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La frontera, where it characterizes the inhabitants of the borderlands. The "prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants/ . . . the squint-eyed, the/perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel . . . in short, those who cross over, pass over or go through the/confines of the 'normal'" (Borderlands 3). Flavio Risech extends Anzaldúa's idea of the borderland as gendered to examine the complex intersections of racial, cultural, national and political identity that become evident in violating the embargo--a crossing over he defines a "cross-dressing."

The work of queer Cuban and Cuban American authors is central to Bridges, including Achy Obejas, Elias Miguel Muñoz, Eduardo Aparicio and Reinaldo Arenas. Ruth Behar points out that in the rhetoric of both Cuban revolutionary and Cuban exile nationality "manhood and nationhood [are] fused and confused." She and many of the authors she collects in the anthology specifically challenge the hypermasculine, hyper-heterosexual posture that has marked both the revolution and exile Miami. As Flavio Risech, points out, traditionally "neither *Revolucionario* nor anti-communist *gusano* can be a *maricón*" ("Cross-Dressing" 58). Moreover, Behar's introduction and a good many of the essays, art work, fiction and poetry collected in the anthology foreground the ways in which issues of homosexuality have historically become enmeshed with Cuban revolutionary and exile politics in curious, contradictory ways, including Behar's "Queer Times in Cuba."

Bridge writers like Coco Fusco and Cristina García employ multiple-voiced, non-linear narratives to disrupt geo-political and ideological borders between Cubans on both sides on the Florida Straits. They employ "polymorphic narration [and] permeable borders .

... between genre, among national identification, in the dialectic of self and other" to create, as John Berger puts it, "new ways of telling" (qtd. in Stefanko, "New Ways of Telling" 41). These multiple-voiced narratives reveal "unresolved historical dialogues between continuity and disruption, essence and positionality, homogeneity and difference" (Stafanko, "New Ways of Telling" 45).

By disrupting unitary readings of the nation, Behar's anthology provides complex definitions of Cuban and Cuban American identity. Such a project is "derived from the heterogenous and differentiated limits . . . of territory" ("New Ways of Telling" 52). It necessarily opens up a "more productive political space . . . than can effectively disrupt the homogeneous line of state articulation" ("New Ways of Telling" 51). In doing so, Behar's collection comments on the ways in which we may best go about theorizing a resistant sense of cultural, ethnic and national identity. Her anthology provides a sense of place that avoids the inane traps of both unmediated relativism and the terror of nationalist essentialism. Between the yellow covers of Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba, the poems, stories, essays and art work of "enemies" lie next to one another like children napping, however fitfully, in the summer sun.

Literary Fore-Mothers: Claiming a Tradition of Dialogue

Lourdes, I have no right to call to you, /disturbing the lonely river of your bones, /which winds around the illustrious men/who lived for Cuba just as much as you did/Lourdes, I should be saying this, / but they gave you a grave I found too plain/and etched on the monument words from José Martí. . ./Lourdes, it was your words I wanted. . . /Or do women's words not belong on tombstones?

– Ruth Behar, "Prayer for Lourdes"

Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba has done much to re-write Cuban women into the national and literary record, providing considerable space for their work. The book showcases the work of women on both sides of the Straits prominently and resurrects the

texts of ignored Cuban American and Cuban women writers like Lourdes Casal and Dulce Maria Lornaz,³ the "intellectual grandmother for Cuban writers and artists of a second generation, who have only recently discovered her"(Behar, "Introduction" 15).

In Ruth Behar's anthology, women's communities--private and public, literal and literary--provide vital, viable opportunity for contact, communication and resistance. Indeed, women, long excluded by official discourses on both sides of the Florida Straits, have long played a vital role in spanning the distance between Cubans. As Coco Fusco writes, among those who have "consistently tried to lessen polarizations" between Cubans on the island and abroad "have been women" ("El Diario de Miranda/Miranda's Diary," *Bridges* 215). After the revolution of 1959 and the 1962 embargo, the areas that have kept Cubans "bound despite politics" have included primarily those of "family and culture," that is, spheres traditionally ascribed to women. While "official channels of communication" remain jammed by empty or aggressive rhetoric, viable and dynamic exchanges across the Straits have taken "forms associated with female discursive practices," that is "home gatherings, letters, gossip, and other intimate forms of conversation" ("El Diario de Miranda/Miranda's Diary" 216). In this context, even the most dutiful *ama de casa* or housewife can circumvent and so potentially subvert formidable ideological divisions.

Perhaps because Cuban women have been traditionally excluded from *el politiquero*, they may function in a pocket of invisibility within its otherwise inflexible structures of power, ultimately providing the space for potential change. The blockade continues, our fathers may bluster on the street corners, giving themselves coronaries, but it is our dutiful

³ Lornaz is sometimes described as the Emily Dickenson of the Antilles, as her work represents a "courageous resistance, a womanist absence from male power struggles" (Behar, "Introduction" 15).

mothers who quietly mail packages to our aunts in Cuba - packages containing medicines and underwear, pre-natal vitamins, *batas de casa*, children's shoes, fabric for wedding dresses. Our mothers write self-censored letters in neat calligraphy learned at the convent schools, announcing deaths, sending photos marking *quinceas*, births. In paternalistic context of exile politics, "*cosas de mujeres*" are hardly deemed important enough to merit any attention, and so the letters continue, unchallenged, a sort of low-level airmail underground that gets past the embargo-wall.

If it weren't for the correspondence of my grandmother, great aunts and my mother with their counterparts in Cuba, I would never have known that I have cousins, aunts, a half dozen great aunts and a gaggle of second cousins in Santiago and Baracoa. I would never have known their names, and they would not know my name. If I left it up to the men, I would never meet my aunts and *primas*. Indeed, the first time I tried to go to Cuba, my father barred my passage with the threat of a paternal social death, a possibility too historically real to ignore as idle. My grandmother, on the other hand, quietly pointed to a picture in National Geographic of a colonial house with barrel tiles--the house in which she raised her children. I was able to use that image to later find that very house, where I was greeted by aunts who answered the door, took one look at me and began to cry. Much to my surprise, they knew exactly who I was, thanks to those letters and photos sent over decades. When a character in Achy Obejas' short story "We Came All The Way from Cuba So You Could Dress like That?" expresses her desire to go to Cuba, her father hides her Cuban passport and birth certificate, which she needs to apply for a visa, adding: "Do you think I would let you betray us like that?" (*We Came All The Way* 126). After her father's death, her mother returns the documents to her. When Shapiro-Rok is preparing to leave for Cuba, her aunt whispers "furtively" to her and gives her the

address of her cousin in Havana, adding: "Don't tell your father I told you about her. She's a communist" ("Find What Has Been Lost" Bridges 93). Our mothers have inadvertently helped maintain links that would have otherwise been lost, rewriting our "enemies" as the family they are.

The distinction between public and personal, theoretical and material is lost in this collection. In fact, the texts collected in Bridges/Puentes blur boundaries of genre and adopt a fluid style - apt for a book about building bridges, I suppose. In "Third Options: Beyond the Border" Madeline Camara asserts that as a feminist, she values "fluid" texts and the "possibility of writing everyday life into theory and vice versa" (217).

The narratives included in the anthology reflect the bridge-building project in that most of the works are produced in the forms of dialogueues--conversations, letters between two women--or other unofficial forms of communication, including diaries. Ruth Behar and Lucia Suarez produce their collaborative piece in the form of an informal talk with Nancy Morejón entitled simply "Two Conversations" (Bridges 129 - 139). Nancy Morejón, a Cuban national, writes several outstanding poems for women across the Straits, including "Before a Mirror" written for Sonia Rivera-Valdés in New York (Bridges 125 - 126). Teresa Marrero's "Miembros Fantasma/Ghost Limbs" takes the shape of a letter between two cousins who have never met, Isabel and Caridad (Bridges 44 - 57). In fact, the texts that appear in Puentes often call and respond to one another, writing for one another across the border, subverting the authority of economic sanctions and ideological divisions by rendering them ineffectual--unable to regulate either emotional or creative lives.

Behar begins the Bridges/Puentes anthology with a poem by Lourdes Casal entitled "For Ana Velford" (1981). Behar follows Casal poem with a poem of her own, "Prayer to Lourdes," in which she addresses the long-dead Casal in a language both

intimate and honorific. The two poems create the first of what proves to be a series of call-and-response texts that speak to one another in intimate tones like a conversation between sisters, or lovers or letters that have been read and lost and found and read again in another age.

Behar writes that in thinking about bridge-building projects she is "struck by the central role played by two brilliant Cuban American women," Lourdes Casal and Ana Mendieta. Both women died when they were at the "height of their creative powers," Lourdes in 1981 and Ana in 1985. Behar especially and explicitly claims Casal and Areito as the literary "predecessor" to the Bridges/Puentes project ("Introduction" 9). "There is no question that the first plank of the bridge to Cuba was thrown into the sea by Lourdes Casal" ("Introduction" 9).

Lourdes Casal was a marvelously talented essayist, poet, fiction writer, organizer and activist. Publishing by 1971 in the U.S., she was perhaps the first post-1959 Cuban American writer to produce work marked by a distinct sense of bi-culturation identity. As early as 1971, her fiction expressed a distinct sense of dual dislocation. According to Eliana Rivero, "it is with Lourdes Casal that Cuban writers in the United States can begin to claim their cultural dualism" as even her early work "points to a recognition of existential and sociocultural hybridism" ("Sugarcane Memories" 173).

Lourdes Casal, a light-skinned *mulata china*, embodied all three races represented on the island—black, white and Asian (Chinese). Born to an upper-middle class professional family in Havana, she attended private schools, including la Universidad Catolica de Santo Tomas de Villanueva in Marianao, where she studied engineering. Her literary talents, however, became evident during these years. She edited various school journals and periodicals and took second place in the university literary contest with an

essay on the liberalism of Father Felix Varela (de la Cuesta, Itinerario ideológico 4). Her third years at Villanueva, Casal reconsidered her course of study and abandoned engineering for psychology. She also became involved with various members of the 26 of July Movement and became active in a Catholic student group engaged in anti-Batista activities. After the revolution of 1959, Casal joined the Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil. But she soon came to oppose Castro and left the country.

In 1962, she came to reside in New York City, where she became a naturalized citizen, completed her clinical training and began teaching and writing professionally (de la Cuesta, Itinerario ideológico 5). During the early 1970s, she published her most stridently anti-Castro piece, El Caso Padilla (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1971). She published various sociological studies on race in Cuba and on Cubans in the U.S., including The Cuban Minority Study (Boca Raton: Florida Atlantic University, 1972). In these early years, she also began publishing creative fiction, including Los fundadores: Alfonso y otros cuentos (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1973), among the few works that give voice to Chinese-Cuban history. Her short stories include "Rodrigo de Triana" (1971), "Salvador en Cuatro Tiempos" (1971), "Maria Valdes or Colina Universitaria" (1973), a satire of Cecilia Valdes, and the highly intertextual "Love Story, Segun Cyrano Prufrock" (1973). Casal's fiction and her essays have a kind of stark, poetic quality about them. Indeed, her writing possesses a kind of muscularity so tender that it leaves the reader feeling as naked and helpless as a baby bird.

Casal's experiences in the United States and her association with civil rights activists politicized her, and she soon began to adopt a position of "critical sympathy" with the Cuban Revolution (de la Cuesta, Itinerario ideológico 6). According to Nancy Morejón, a friend of Casal and an important Cuban poet in her own right, Lourdes long struggled to

understand why she left Cuba. Morejón explains: "I got confused myself, because I was in the same circle as the students at Villa Nueva . . . I assumed the values of a class that I didn't belong to. And it was only in the United States that Lourdes noticed what color she was, what kind of hair she had, that she was a woman, do you understand? And then she noticed the mechanism that kept her from understanding what was going on here [in Cuba] ("Two Conversations," Bridges 136 - 137).

In 1971, Casal began to collaborate with Nueva generación, a progressive journal founded by young Cuban Americans. Its writers wanted to be allowed to relate to the contemporary island and decided that in order to escape from becoming a "*generación perdida*," or a lost generation, they had to serve as a "*generación puente*," that is, a "bridge" between Cubans in the two countries (Havana USA 204). That year, Casal attended the first and second Cuban Studies Conference, whose members tended toward the radical desire for a dialogue with Cuban nationals. In 1972, she helped found the Institute for Cuban Studies - a center dedicated to free and open exchange between Cuba and the United States. The Institute continues to serve as a vital communication link between the two countries through publications, exchange programs and art projects. It acts as a clearing-house for balanced, reliable information on Cuba, especially in its much-respected library services. (The Library was renamed after Lourdes following her death.)

At the end of 1972, a Cuban functionary named Alfredo Pila approached the Nueva generación authors and invited the group to visit Cuba to assess the realities of the Cuban revolution for themselves. Lourdes accepted and made her first trip to Cuba in 1973 - one first of her generation to return to post-revolutionary Cuba. She returned to the island again a few months later for an academic conference and was "converted . . . to the revolution" (de la Cuesta, Itinerario ideológico 7).

On her return, she helped found Arieto, a literary magazine that published the work of young Cubans both on and off the island. The editorial board of Areito voted to adopt an attitude of open support for the revolution, and Areito became a meeting point for Cuban Americans supportive of the Cuban revolution. This "nucleus" helped form the controversial Antonio Maceo brigades, which allowed small groups of young Cuban Americans to return to island to reestablish familial, artistic and intellectual connections. In 1978, Casal and other Areito authors anthologized their experience with the brigades in Contra viento y marea (Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1978), recounting the traumatic experience of immigrating with their parents and their alienation within Anglo-America. In the introduction, Casal wrote that "against wind and tide, and contrary to all expectation and probabilities," she and those who appeared in the anthology "identified with Cuba, from the very cradle of exile and in the middle of North American society" (qtd. in Havana USA 202).

Moreover, the work of Casal helped initiate "*el diálogo*" in 1978, which involved discussions between a group of Cubans living in exile, the Cuban government and the Carter administration. This exchange resulted in the release of thousands of political prisoners on the island and helped establish the family reunification flights of 1979 and 1980, which allowed Cubans living in the U.S to visit family members on the island for the first time since the revolution.

Lourdes built bridges; she "crossed them multiple times and encouraged others to do the same. It was a gradual process and it was a conscious one. She was valiant and honest in her path" (de la Cuesta, Itinerario ideológico 11). But to some degree, she may have built the bridge to Cuba on her back, that is, at the expense of her body. By the time Lourdes had begun to help organize *el diálogo*, her health had begun to suffer. She was

plagued by kidney problems, which early steroid treatments had exacerbated. By 1978, Casal had begun to require dialysis. In December of 1979, she fell ill during a trip to Cuba, where she was hospitalized in the Clínica Cira García. She died at that same hospital in 1981. Lourdes Casal, the "mother" of the Antonio Maceo Brigades, and was buried in the pantheon of exiled revolutionaries, near the mother of Jose Martí. Fidel Castro sent a wreath (de la Cuesta, Itinerario ideológico 8).

In 1981, the year of her death, Casal published a series of poems collected in Palabras Juntan Revolución (La Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1981), which won the prestigious Casa de las Américas award in Havana. Palabras includes "For Ana Velford" and "Definition," one of her better-known poems. In "Definition," Casal articulates the alien ache that defines diaspora. "Exile/ is living where no house exists/in which we were children" (Palabras Juntan Revolución 43).

"For Ana Velford," too, describes a similar sense of alienation, the feeling of being "forever a stranger among the stones" (Bridges to Cuba 21 - 22). "For Ana Velford" begins with the speaker sitting behind the window of a bus traveling along New York's Riverside Park on a "limpid" summer afternoon. Casal contrasts summer in New York with North American winter landscapes to mark a sense of separation. "I remain as foreign behind this protective glass/as I was that winter . . . /when I first confronted Vermont's snow" (Bridges 22).

Casal describes New York as her home, but in qualified terms. She feels a "fierce loyalty" to New York, her "acquired *patria chica*." (The term *patria chica*, which means "little homeland," typically refers to those ethnic enclaves that dot the U.S. landscape like Little Havana or Little Italy.) She describes her love for her "acquired" homeland in language as concrete and corporeal as the "sweaty brow" of a cyclist who hangs on to her

window--so near she feels she could "touch summer" on his wet skin. She has a "fierce pride" in the smells and sounds of the West Side that "assault" her as she slowly travels along on the bus. For her, the unmistakable odor of marijuana, beer and dog urine and the "savage vitality of Santana" descending from a speaker "improbably balanced on a fire/escape" define the "raucous glory" of her *patria chica*. Her attachment to these gritty sounds, smells and experiences, mark her as an unmistakable New Yorker. "Because of New York, I am a foreigner anywhere else" (Bridges 22 - 23).

However, as the bus sails sleepily down Fifth Avenue, she is reminded that she is not completely *newyorquina*. "But New York wasn't the city of my childhood,/it is not here that I acquired my first convictions,/not here the spot that I took my first fall,/nor the piercing whistle that marked the night" (Bridges 23). In these lines, Casal frames childhood experience as critical to her sense of self in chronologically descending terms that move from the adult and abstract to the primordial and perhaps pre-linguistic--first convictions (which require some level of conscious thought), the sting of the first toddling fall, the whistle that pierces the night (amorphous and haunting). Because of her childhood in Cuba, she "always remains on the margins,/a stranger among the stones" despite the "friendly sun of this summers day" (Bridges 22).

By the time "For Ana Velford" was published in 1981, Casal had devoted much of her adult life to undoing the emotional, artistic and political effects of the embargo. However, in "For Ana Velford," Casal entertains no fantasies of uncomplicated return to her origins--even when she returns to Cuba, to the city of her childhood. Because of New York, she "always" remains "a foreigner," carrying "this marginality, immune to all turning back." In fact, she is homeless in two cities, "too *habanera* to be *newyorkina*, too *newyorkina* to be/-- even to become again--/anything else" (Bridges 23). As Nancy

Morejón puts it, when Lourdes returned to Cuba, she "understood that she already had a new skin that hadn't been formed here." It is that "struggle," that ability to say "This is what I am, I'm betwix and between" that gives her work its "vivacity" ("Two Conversations," Bridges 136).

Ultimately, Casal created "the miracle that we could hold a conversation" ("Two Conversations" 134). That conversation has proceeded in fits and starts, sometimes slowly and cautiously over coffee, sometimes all at once in airports or empty rooms. It is delicate and dangerous work, always laced with the possibility of love and violence. Today, those who continue the project of normalizing relations between Cuba and the United States have begun to claim Lourdes as their own. Excluded from anthologies of Cuban American literature for decades, Casal has begun take her in her rightful place at the center of Cuban American arts and letters, referred to by a set of scholars in the U.S., in Europe, in Latin American and the Caribbean. As Behar writes, "Lourdes, we are citing you in so many places . . . In Miami, New York, Madrid, Mexico City, Ann Arbor, Rome, Chicago, Santo Domingo, Paris, Tulsa . . . /Name a city where a Cuban has not found an island" ("Prayer for Lourdes" 24). In Bridges, Lourdes's voice once again leads the way for those dreamers, iconoclast, ingrates, who would attempt to transcend (and so defy, disrupt and challenge) geo-political, artistic and emotional borders between Cubans on both sides of the Florida Straits.

Writing History on the Body

You became the Artist, because you could do nothing else . . . /you laid your body down on the earth . . . /you covered it with blood and flowers,/ with mud and rock./ and you traced your outline,/your silhouette of indefinite . . . profiles. -- Raquel Mendieta, "Silhouette"

When my grandmother came,/she brought along a bit of Spanish soil,/When my mother left, she took away a bit of Cuban soil . . . -- Carilda Oliver Labra, "Soil"

Bridge writers travel to the forbidden island, disrupting geo-political and ideological borders between Cubans divided by the borders of the nation. Exile-identified writers tend to either relegate the island to a place of non-existence or describe it demonized terms. They plumb their memories and describe the island in pregnant, portentous terms--a "crocodile" or a "key" or a "question mark" as Pablo Medina puts it ("Cuba," Little Havana Blues 120 -121). Bridge writers, however, look directly at the island, rather than over their shoulders in a mirror as in the Medusa myth. They do not relegate the island and its citizens to a place of non-existence. Indeed, many engage in co-operative artistic ventures with Cuban nationals – an unforgivable transgression⁴ in exile Miami, one of the few cities in the world where "an immigrant's natural desire to relate to the homeland" in anything but narrow terms is "treated as an act of betrayal" (Torres, "Beyond the Rupture," Bridges 39). Despite the dangers, as Bridge author Maria de los Angeles Torres writes, it has become increasingly clear that young people on both sides of the Straits are increasingly refusing to define themselves by national frameworks of identity perpetuated by those who have "benefited from the divisions." Many Cubans both "on and off the island are all in search of a new context We are redefining what it means to be Cuban. For me this included being able to have a normal relationship with the

⁴ In 1989 alone, "eighteen bombs went off in the homes and businesses of Cuban exiles working to better relations with Cuba" (Torres, "Beyond the Rupture" 38). Radio announcer Milián, who lost his legs in a bombing because he suggested the embargo had proven ineffective serves as a "grim and lasting warning . . . to those who ideologically transgress" (Risech, "Cross-Dressing" 65). Extremist exile groups have "bombed Cuban embassies and consulates around the world, murdered Cuban diplomatic employees, harassed and threatened individuals and institutions alleged to have ties to the Castro government, and placed bombs aboard planes headed for Cuba." More frightening still, the exile community rallies to the aid of those suspected terrorists jailed on various charges. For example, Miami exiles staged marches to protest the incarceration of Orlando Bosch in Venezuela, a popular "activist" who attacked a Polish freighter with a bazooka. He is also the prime suspect of an Air Barbados explosion which killed 73 people (Havana USA 144 - 145).

nation of my birth; for my friends in Cuba, it is a redefinition of nationhood. We coincide" ("Beyond the Rupture" 40, 35).

Exile-identified Cuban American authors appeal to essential notions of identity and unified national narratives to make sense of their lives. However, many Puentes authors ground identity in terms that resist meta-narrative--materialist and otherwise. In a phrase that undercuts Fidel Castro's famous "history will absolve me" speech, Behar's locates Bridges in terms of a dialectical history that is always in process, that is, a history that has yet to be "resolved let alone absolved" (Behar, "Introduction" 18). Bridge writers call attention to the partial and multiple natures of identity and history, foregrounding disjunction and displacement and making plain the fictions of national identity. For instance, Cristina García's Celia lives by the sea and takes comfort in the fact that that the "tides rearrange the borders . . . To be locked within boundaries plotted by priests and politicians would be intolerable . . . (Dreaming in Cuban 99). Pilar would re-write history in a revisionist, feminist manner. She questions the methods of historiography itself and longs to hear a history written not by powerful men, but by prostitutes in Bombay--by marginalized women. She resents "the politicians and the generals who . . . dictate the memories we'll have when we're old. Every day Cuba fades a little more inside me, my grandmother fades a little more inside me. And there is only my imagination where our history should be" (Dreaming in Cuban 138). García also calls attention to the infancy of the nation and its fictional, unitary narratives. She dwarfs the nation by foregrounding geological time. Indeed, in García's work, time is measured not in linear calendar terms, but in terms of plate tectonics--cyclical, geological time. Celia, for instance, envisions the continents pulling slowly apart and wonders if Cuba will be left behind with its "memories"(Dreaming in Cuban 48).

The women in Dreaming in Cuban are forced to decipher meaning from partial texts, reading and interpret history and one another from fragments. At best, they only get part of the story. Celia can't hear Jorge when he appears to her as a ghost. Lourdes cannot decipher the words her rapist carves in her flesh. The twins mistrust the "pretty words" that keep them "prisoners" in an "alphabet world" (121). In fact, a unified and unitary narrative becomes impossible in García's Dreaming. Through the "unstable terrain" her characters inhabit, García "rejects the assumption" of a "unitary synthesizing narrator" capable of telling a single story (Stefanko, "New Ways of Telling" 45). Her polyglossic narrative style and complex, non-linear narrative structure call attention to and ultimately subvert fictions of national, racial and gendered identities.

Texts employing fragmented, multiple-voiced narrative structures appear repeatedly in the Puentes anthology. Rita Martin's "Elisa or the Price of Dreams" achieves a kind of post-modernist fragmentation and relativity that unmoors positivist notions of the world. In "Elisa," nothing is sure, nothing can be measured or named. The text of her piece (which defies definitions of genre) features a fragmented female voice, a "she" who is not sure how long she has been "given over to levitation." The text is interspersed with a din of other intrusive voices--unintelligible minstrels and bold-faced eruptions, including voices that call the unnamed woman a "common whore." In fact, the text approaches a fragmentation bordering on the unreadable in which nothing is fixed and where the ephemeral air is the "only real substance even if one were sure of the earth" (Bridges 295).

Some pieces focus on communication that abandons the word altogether. In the Bridges essay "Dialogueue Among the Deaf," Patricia Boero communicates with her deaf cousin in gestures--a language system she has wonderfully devoid of divisive words like *gusano* or *comunista* (Bridges 194). In Cristina García's Dreaming in Cuban, Pilar

communicates with her Abuela Celia telepathically, and Felicia speaks in greens and reads the coconuts, divining the future with a complex cryptographic meta-language central to Afro-Cuban religions. The twins communicate in their own private, bodily "double helix" code. Celia promises to teach an infant Lourdes how to read the "columns of blood and numbers in men's eyes" (42). Pilar plays the cello, an instrument so substantial that she can barely lift it and which produces a humming so deep that she can feel it coursing throughout her whole body. Other Puente authors also focus on artists who use their own bodies as a primary medium.

Appeals to corporeal ways of knowing recur in the language of many Bridge writers, perhaps as a response to the surreal space that Cuba inhabits. Many Puentes authors describe a need to experience the island first hand, often in bodily ways--a penchant I can certainly appreciate. After all, my brain is trying to kill me, but my guts have never led me wrong. In García's Dreaming in Cuban, Pilar, who left the island at the age of two and who does not share her reactionary mother's hatred of communism, "longs to see Cuba through [her] own eyes" (186). Behar, too, "longed to return to Cuba and see the island with [her] own eyes" ("Introduction," Bridges 6). Rosa Lowinger wants to "see" the country for herself "to form an opinion of it" for herself--not one based on the dubious "memories of [her] family" ("Repairing Things," Bridges 98). In "Grandmother's Night," Sonia Rivera-Valdes awakes with a start, a pain in her chest and the sudden, awful recollection of an event that occurred as she and her family left Cuba when she was a child. The recollection contradicts her family's adamant claims about their experience. But Sonia's memory arrives whole, slapping her out of sleep with the hard hand of undeniable understanding. That knowledge, which arrives first as a sharp, piercing pain

in her chest, remains so insistently clear that her family's angry denials are unable to dislodge it again (Bridges 226 - 228).

The dubious nature of our own memories and family narratives--colored by trauma and by wishful thinking--mirrors the difficulty of finding information about the island that it is not shaped by polemic, by misinformation, by official forms of denial and obfuscation. These factors combine to make textual accounts about the island unreliable, at best. For instance, Maria de los Angeles Torres arrived in the United States as a child via Operation Peter Pan--a covert operation.⁵ Her first memories of the experience "erupted" as an inexplicable, bodily sense of panic when she watched children being flown out of Vietnam on television. Despite her family's denials, Torres began to piece together her history. In her early years of researching Operation Peter Pan, she wrote the State Department for information about her arrival in the United States during that exodus. The State Department replied: "We may neither confirm nor deny the existence or non-existence of records responsive to your request" (Beyond the Rupture 33). For decades, her childhood existed in the bureaucratic limbo between her memory, her family's version of events and "classified" documents, between existence and non-existence. Today, those documents have been declassified, confirming her memories about the circumstances of her arrival.

The writers who appear in Bridges also appeal to the material and the corporeal as a response to the deeply "unreal" contours of returning to Cuba. As Maria del los Angeles Torres, writes, when we return, "we have few words . . . with which to understand . . .

⁵ Between 1960 and 1962, Cuban parents, alarmed by CIA misinformation that the Cuban government was preparing to deprive them of parental rights and send their children to re-education camps in the Soviet Union, sent an estimated 14,000 unaccompanied Cuban minors to the U.S. through a Catholic priest--the largest such migration in Western hemisphere.

what we are experiencing" ("Beyond the Rupture" 33). I distinctly remember feeling like I was outside my body as I walked up to my grandmother's house in Baracoa. I had to rest my head against the massive carved door of the house, with my cheek pressed against the rough wood of the weathered door, until I could knock and break what felt like a spell. Ester Shapiro Rok's broken ankle, which she shatters in Cuba hurrying with her cousin to catch a bus so they could continue a conversation, becomes the painfully real "metaphor for [her] own psychic healing, the knitting together of severed ties" ("Finding What Has Been Lost" 94). When artist Ana Mendieta returned from Cuba for the first time in 1980, she brought back with her a bit of sand - earth that Jane Blocker suggests Mendieta may very well have eaten,⁶ that is, incorporated it into her own body, the "beautiful brown earth crunching between her white teeth (Where is Ana Mendieta? 89).

Ana Mendieta, whose work is central to Bridges, employed her own body to create powerful installations. Her work often incorporated organic elements--hair, blood, earth--to make strange the familiar, that is, to perform "home" as "exile" and vice versa. As an art student Mendieta gave up painting because it wasn't "real enough." Rather, she wanted her work to have performative power, to "be magic" (Ana Mendieta qtd. in Behar, "Introduction" 11). As a result, Ana tended to draw upon the ritual elements of "primitive" traditions, including *santería*, a complex syncretic Afro-Cuban religion. In Miami, she packed her naked body into the roots of a ceiba tree with mud, like an offering to an *orisha*. In Mexico, she lay down on a Zapotec site, surrounded by flowers. She poured gun powder

⁶Ana Mendieta adapted an ethnographic narrative about women who eat dirt by Levy Bruhl's to foreground gender in the performance of exile and home. "There is an African custom which I think is analogous . . . to my own work. The men of Kimberley go outside their village to seek their brides. When a man brings his new wife home, the woman brings with her a sack of earth from her homeland and every night she eats a bit of that earth. The earth will help her make the transition between her homeland and her new home" (Ana Mendieta qtd. in Blocker 84).

in the resulting silhouette and ignited it, so that her body was "at once consumed and resurrected in the flames" (Behar, "Introduction" 11).

Behar cites the work of Ana Mendieta as emblematic of the Bridges/Puentes project. Like Lourdes Casal, Ana Mendieta, the first Cuban American artist to have her work exhibited in Cuba, helped establish ties between artistic communities in Cuba and abroad. Five separate texts in the Bridges invoke Ana, including Raquel Mendieta's "Silhouette" and Nancy Morejon's poem "Ana Mendieta" which describes Ana as migratory bird, a swallow composed of the elements Mendieta employed in her work: "A swallow of sand and clay/A swallow of water/A swallow of fire" (Bridges 123).

In many ways, Ana Mendieta's experience of migration represents one of the cruelest chapters in Cold War politics. In 1961, Ana, then twelve years old, arrived in the United States with her younger sister, like Maria de los Angeles Torres, through Operation Peter Pan. Ana and her sister, who hailed from an important aristocratic family in Havana, were sent to Iowa, where their dark hair and deep olive coloring marked them as suspiciously "Latin." As her cousin Raquel Mendieta writes, in Cuba, Ana and her sister had never had to think about their ethnicity or race (Blocker, Where is Ana Mendieta? 53). But in Iowa, the Catholic charity charged with placing the sisters in foster homes had difficulties finding willing sponsors, primarily because of their coloring. One foster family accused the girls of stealing. Ana and her sister were transferred between foster homes, juvenile correction facilities and orphanages, where they were called "niggers" and whores. "Since I looked Latin, I was always *la putica*, to them" (Ana Mendieta qtd. in "Silhouette" 75). That experience, her *cambio de piel* would manifest

itself later in her work as an acute awareness of the nature of race as discursively produced.

In 1971, Ana enrolled in the University of Iowa's painting program, but her work gravitated toward performance art. In 1972, she transferred to the Intermedia program and began producing alarming experimental actions and performances centered on women's bodies and the subject of rape. In 1975, she began creating her "Silhouette" series, in which she imprinted her own body in landscapes. Mendieta's work with earth appealed to origins older than nation, as she wrote, "to the orphanhood, the unbaptized earth of the beginning" (Ana Mendieta qtd. in Behar, "Introduction" 11). But Mendieta's work with earth does not represent an attempt to claim territory or to "fix herself in one country." On the contrary, "with respect to nationality, the earth can provide only the possibility of flux . . . By searching for roots in earth and not in country, she can claim an identity anywhere" (Blocker, Where is Ana Mendieta? 78).

Between 1980 and 1984, Mendieta made seven extended trips to Cuba, establishing connection with artists and intellectuals on the island. During those years, she created her Rupestrian sculptures, which she carved and painted on cave walls at Jaruco with the permission of the Cuban government. The sculptures, evocative of the Venus of Willendorf and named for pre-Colombia Taino goddesses, were meant to be reclaimed by the sea (Behar, "Introduction" 11). In Mendieta's work, the meanings of race, gender, nation, "are by turned fixed and disrupted, then imbricated to such an extent that it becomes impossible to discuss them as separate entities" (Blocker, Where is Ana Mendieta? 126).

Mendieta's career was prolific, but brief. In 1985, she fell to her death from her New York high-rise. *Las malas lenguas* say that her husband, Carl Andres, an art critic,

pushed her to her death. Morejón envisions Mendieta, "fragile as lightening" leaning out of her window to "watch the multitudes pass" because they bring her "remembrances/old, resonant, sweet . . ./of some side street in the South, in El Vedado." Morejón then contrasts the quiet, calm image of Ana looking over the city with an abrupt set of lines, a movement that mimics the surprise of a sudden fall. "Ana, cast into space,/Ana, our lady of despair,/yourself sculpted in the hostile cement of Broadway"(Bridges 122).

In the second stanza, Morejón links the image of Ana with that of fragile, "simple swallows," which migrate each summer North, toward those "vast cities aflame with comfort and with fright"(Bridges 123). Like Ana, swallows seem to be forever in motion--characterized by frenetic, quick bursts of flight. (In fact, swallows are said to cease their flying only to nest.) Morejón then links the image of swallows to somber spaces, depicting them as "little crosses" that "nest in the domes of certain medieval churches." Morejón contrasts images of movement with stillness and death--a reversal of the previous stanza. "A black drizzle falls on your silhouette./Your sleeping silhouette lulls us/like a supreme goddess of inequality . . ./Ana with her enchanted orphan's hand" (Bridges 123).

In the final stanza, Morejón imagines Ana's silhouette moving again, gliding like a kite which "flees" from the cold "fictitious" cities of the North and the "desert" Ana "found in orphanages." Her silhouette sails over the red roofs of Old Havana, "skirting indigenous cypresses" and comes to rest in the "sure clouds" of the mountains. She comes to rest in the "humid land" and deep moss of the caves of Jaruco, "that place, yours now, more than ever" (Bridges 123 - 124). In Morejón's "Ana Mendieta," death acts only as a presage to homecoming. It cannot keep women who love one another apart. Indeed, the

women who appear in the Puentes anthology speak not only across time and beyond borders, but beyond death, which cannot interrupt a conversation by turns animated and anguished. Ana's art, "evanescent as a sand castle," has created a "lasting inspiration for Cuban artists inside and outside Cuba" (Behar, "Introduction" 11).

Crossing Over

We had burned the bridge and were not to look back, lest we turn into pillars of salt. — Ruth Behar, "Introduction" to Bridges

Those Cuban American authors who travel to the island encounter tremendous resistance, both internal and external—a phenomenon inherent in the act of breaching boundaries. Traveling to Cuba presents tremendous emotional and familial difficulties. For Torres, already estranged from her parents because of her "radical" views, traveling to Cuba would be the "definitive break" with her family (Torres, "Beyond the Rupture" 29). When Coco Fusco decides to make the trip, a family friend tells her she will be kidnapped by the secret police and forced to work as a prostitute for visiting Russians. His oldest daughter, however, approaches Fusco and asks her to visit their old family house to take pictures. "She says she'd like to go with me, but can't because she might get fired from her job for doing so" ("Diary of Miranda" 203).

When Behar decides to go to Cuba, she experiences a strange psychosomatic paralysis that almost forces her to cancel the trip. Her parents, convinced they would never see her again, have Behar make out a will awarding them custody of her daughter. "I became bed-ridden with a mysterious illness. My legs were too weak to stand on . . . my body was forcing me to confront the internalized blockade" ("Introduction" 7). She makes the trip despite a sense of absolute terror, and discovers, to her surprise, "extraordinary people in Cuba who . . . had been told . . . to view the bridge to the United States as burnt and broken, just as my parents had told me" ("Introduction" 7).

The experience of Ester Shapiro-Rok, recorded in the Bridges essay "Finding What Has Been Lost in Plain View," in many ways typifies the experience of many Cuban American authors to travel to Cuba--primarily in the ways her forces her to contend with dubious familial-national narratives. Shapiro-Rok left Cuba at the age of eight in 1960. As an adolescent, she repeatedly dreamed of a "bridge which suddenly shifts beneath [her] feet to become the shakiest of foundations," a dream which she interpreted at the time as indicative of a "fragmented sense of identity" (Bridges 85). She eventually understood that the island "beckoning" on the other side was Cuba. But for nearly thirty years, she dared not "step across that bridge . . . except in nostalgic dreams of hauntingly familiar yet always elusive landscape" (Bridges 86). For Shapiro-Rok, a Jewish Cuban American clinical psychologist, the bridge to Cuba comes to represent a psychic space between memory and forgetting, loss and reconciliation.

In order to understand her sense of dislocation, Shapiro-Rok had to directly challenge her family's version of her past and national historical narratives. In fact, she learned to make a career of trying to piece together her history from conflicting memories and experiences. In the course of her training as a therapist, she explores relationship between the diasporic experience and inter-generational trauma extensively and develops a "dialectical" model of family development that examines an individual's life experiences as directly "responsive to historical . . . political and intergenerational" forces. Indeed, her counseling theories "evolved directly from [her] need to create coherence out of a shattering personal and family legacy of politically motivated traumatic immigration" (Bridges 86).

In trying to recover her history from its fragments, Shapiro-Rok draws important conclusions about the nature of nostalgia, its requisite re-writing and denial of memory, its

effects on the children of exiles. Ultimately, she concludes that her parents' nostalgia, that "secret collection of . . . unexaminable contradictions," amounts to a sort of arrested development that dulled the pain of uprootedness. Nostalgia also interfered with healing, with growth, with the "forward movement of developmental time" and the "integration" of a viable "multicultural identity," a flexibility that she desperately needed to negotiate contending and contradictory cultures (Bridges 86 - 87).

As Shapiro-Rok slowly begins to reconstruct her history, she recovers those lost memories that "immigrants are often forced to jettison by the emotional imperatives of coping with the overwhelming task of transplantation." She begins to look to the island for answers, planning her first trip to the island (Bridges 88). However, she encounters terrific internal resistance and external "obstacles . . . across the path of [her] return," especially in her family system and the "disavowed aspects of . . . my diasporic family legacy, which I needed to retrieve in order to find my way (Bridges 80, 86)

Finally, in 1990, "in the teeth of [her] family's fervent objections," Shapiro-Rok returns to Cuba to face her "loss and the negation of loss," a decision she makes with trepidation (Bridges 92). Her trip to Cuba proves difficult in many ways, but also illuminating. She meets her cousins, whom she finds cultured, committed and kind. Exiles pretend that the island ceased to exist in 1959. But the photos she brought back to her family provided "undeniable evidence of the reality of Cuba" and resurrected an emotional space her "family had lost to ideological enemies and to unexamined grief" (Bridges 95). Her trip, in effect, ruptured many of the "polarizing myths" about Cuban nationals "perpetuated by the Miami Cuban community to maintain ideological distance" (Bridges 93). Her transgression threatened to expose the working of a dominant fiction about Cuban national exile identity, a possibility that exiles resist with heavy-handed determination. "No

wonder they put all their collective weight behind the barrier to my return, no wonder it had taken me so much of my adult life to find the courage" (Bridges 95).

For her, revolutionary Cuba, with its own contradictions and complexities, proves no more a paradise than does the fantasy of the *Cuba de ayer*. She is forced to confront not only her own trauma and grief, but the complex, unfamiliar landscape of contemporary Cuba. However, by refusing to relegate the island to the forbidden, she manages to "make both the Cuba of [her] memory" and the contemporary Cuba with its own "current complicated reality a part of [her] own life story" and in so doing begins to forge a satisfying, flexible, if complex sense of self (Bridges 95).

Returning, of course, poses no easy answers. Many Bridge writers who travel back to Cuba report feeling like "aliens" in conservative Miami (Risech, "Cross-Dressing" 61). However, they do not exactly feel at home in post-revolutionary Cuba either. Those who return are forced to confront a Cuba that has changed tremendously in the last forty years. The material difficulties the economic embargo (and the Soviet withdrawal in the early 1990s) have caused often shock them--the lack of fuel, the empty shelves. Cubans returning for the first time are sometimes met with cool suspicion. Cousins raised on opposite sides of the Straits under vastly different economic and ideological systems may find it difficult to relate to one another. Thirty years of separation, of political posturing, of pride and bitterness, have widened the gulf between Cubans on and off the island. Regardless, people both inside and outside the island continue in search of understanding. "We have lived through an internal struggle . . . between our need to question inherited dogmas and our loyalty to family and community. We don't want to wage the same struggles as our parents, yet we are still caught in the frameworks, fears, and silences of their generation" (Behar, "Introduction "7).

The reality of the island does not permit the illusions of nostalgia. For Behar, This means facing "the fact that we have grown away . . . and that . . . we may never get to know it. Many of those returning are children from the earliest waves of migration, composed of the white upper and middle classes; they find they have to reorient themselves within a society that now legitimates the African contributions to Cuban culture (Behar, "Introduction "10). Moreover, those who return looking for their childhood memories find as Calzada puts it, that that the island has moved on, "no longer recognizable" ("Nothing Lost will Come Back with the Rain," Bridges 96 - 97). Many describe the experience as highly disorienting. Emilio Bejel returns "to the place of origin" to find his godmother "still waiting for [him] with her lips wrinkled," like the revolution, itself also "sharp and wise and withered." He clearly enjoys his godmother's company, carefully translating her stories and concludes that he has "two countries" ("El Libro Regalado," Bridges 82 - 83).

But the experience also makes him reel. In Cuba he finds the "planet hanging from a ladder," as if traveling to the island radically altered the world. He encounters not the Cuba of his memories but a "new universe" that he cannot decipher and that speaks to him "in tongues." The trip to Cuba alters him, changes his perspective, if not sense of proportion: it "shrank" him and "enlarged" like a misplaced character "from Alice's stories" ("El Libro Regalado" 83). I recall the first time one of my friends, a professional photographer, returned from Cuba. He too, seemed smaller and disoriented. He just stared out the window of his office, smoking continually, ignoring the telephone, refusing to talk about the trip, refusing to develop his film for weeks afterward. The trip, however, also enlarged him. When he finally developed his film, we found that he had produced by far the most expressive pieces of his career. As Bejel concludes: "I didn't know . . . that I would tremble on my island/endless and furious" ("El Libro Regalado" 83).

Many Cuban Americans who return to the island despite considerable difficulties inherent in the act of transgressing boundaries report feeling enormously satisfied, though often in unexpected ways. Rosa Lowinger, a conservation architect who returned to Cuba almost by accident, discovered that she wanted to stay for an extended period, to "live in a place" where she felt "closely tied" to her "own history" ("Repairing Things" 101). Indeed, Lowinger never even knew she was homesick until she returned to Havana. "That sense of place is . . . something my parents forgot to pack . . . something I didn't know I had missed until I returned to Old Havana" ("Repairing Things" 101). More importantly, she reports finding the sense of community she "had always longed for" ("Repairing Things" 92). In her socialist cousin's living room, she felt, for the first time, an affirming, lived sense of understanding. "I experienced the extraordinary, longed-for and forbidden pleasure of being a smart independent-minded woman who could see herself reflected and appreciated, confirmed by enduring ties of kinship" ("Repairing Things" 94).

Bridge writers may look to the past to make sense of their history, but do not remain in the nostalgia narrative for long. In facing their past, they manage to make peace with the irreconcilable nature of their identity. As Shapiro-Rok puts it, "only when we can face the anguish of uprootedness, can we gain access to a past that enriches our present and future, restores the forward movement in developmental time, permits the creative integration of a multicultural identity" ("Finding What Has Been Lost" 87).

Cross-dressing

When Ruth Behar first traveled to Cuba for an academic conference, she found on her return that the names of the participants, including hers, had been published in the Miami Herald as a sort of punishment. She and members of her family began to receive threatening phone calls. She writes: "I feel as if I've been outed" ("Queer Times in Cuba,"

Bridges 409). The passage describes her political action in terms that acknowledge (perhaps perpetuate) the association of "left" with "queer" in the exile community. Certainly, Behar's introduction and a good many of the works collected in the anthology foreground the ways in which issues of homosexuality have historically become enmeshed with Cuban exile politics in curious, contradictory ways. Behar's anthology specifically challenges the hypermasculine, hyper-heterosexual posture that has marked both exile Miami and revolutionary Cuba. As Flavio Rísech, points out, traditionally "neither *revolucionario* nor anti-communist *gusano* can be a *maricón* ("Cross-Dressing," Bridges 58). But it also foregrounds the experiences of Cuban and Cuban American lesbians, including Achy Obejas, whose work names at length and in glorious detail *lo que no tiene nombre*, also appears in Puentes. Eduardo Aparicio's portfolio of black and white photographs entitled "Fragmentos de Narraciones Cubanas," also includes the personal histories of lesbian Cuban American activists (Bridges 141 - 160).

In a study of the gay and lesbian Cuban and Cuban American experience, Rich and Arguelles assert that while conditions have been difficult for gay men in the enclave communities, life for noncloseted lesbians in Little Havana, with its strict gender roles, has often been ultimately harder. "They can laugh about a *maricón*. . .but with women, they just can't face it" ("Homosexuality, Homophobia and Revolution" 123). In Cuban communities, as elsewhere, lesbians tend to be made nearly invisible. In "Sunday" Obejas describes that near-invisibility. "We were the open secret/as beautiful and repellent as tattoos" (Bridges 293).

When I was thirteen or so, Carmen, my cousin's wife left him for another woman. My *abuela*, my great aunts, aunts and my mother all gathered around our table, completely baffled. When they finally figured out why Carmen was living with another woman, they

proclaimed: "*Esa cosa no tiene nombre.*" They found the notion of lesbianism so unfamiliar that they struggled for some time before proclaimed it unspeakable, without a "name" to define (or limit?) it. Gay men were sometimes tolerated by the women of the community as "colorful." In fact, when I was a girl, I remember being terribly proud of my mother for defending "Robertico," a "*pajarito*" who came running into the beauty salon where she worked to escape some rather rough men who loitered at the corner café. But Carmen found no such understanding. Once my aunts and mother perceived what Carmen had done, they consigned her to complete exile from the family. I never saw or heard of her again.

The Bridges anthology refuses to render lesbians invisible. In Eduardo Aparicio's extensive portfolio, a photo of Cristina Riley-Lazoat at a rally features prominently. Her placard, which reads "Lesbianas Latinas !Presentes!" and her broad, self-assured smile attest to the "presence" of lesbians, who are often ignored not only the exile community, but by Anglo and Cuban American gay rights activists themselves. Cristina proclaims her political position on Cuba and her sexual identity in the same breath. "I am a lesbian and I work with gays, lesbians and bisexuals in solidarity with Cuba to remove the blockade. I went to Cuba in 1992. In my family I was the first one in my generation to go" ("Fragmentos" 151).

As Rich and Arguelles have pointed out in "Homosexuality, Homophobia and Revolution," issues of sexual orientation have often become enmeshed with Cuban exile politics. In fact, in the late 1970s, gay Cuban Americans were caught in the cross-fire of several specifically political events--*el diálogo* and Anita Bryant's anti-gay campaign, based in Dade County and widely supported by the Cuban exile community. Several *dialogueueros* are openly gay--a fact that did not escape the notice of extreme right-wing

anti-Castro organizers. Intent on blocking the *diálogo*, extremists employed a public crusade of intimidation and harassment to achieve its aims. These groups found the conservatism and homophobia of the community a most "useful weapon" (Rich and Arguelles 127). It became standard practice to attach progressives by labeling them homosexuals in the exile press. Indeed, various editors (apparently fixated) published lurid accounts of the "unnatural sexual practices" of *diálogo* participants (Rich and Arguelles 128).

Rich and Arguelles note that the harassment of homosexuals is hardly limited to the exile Miami community. However, the authors assert that these public "attacks are rather different in scale, intent and consequence" (Rich and Arguelles 127). Verbal harassment in the exile press often preceded physical assault—a tactic which has been such an integral part of "political repression within the enclaves as to constitute . . . a threat of imminent mortality to be taken very seriously" (128). As such, homophobia has become an instrument of exile anti-communism, a terrorist tactic with specific political aims.

As in the exile community, homosexual men have suffered under the Cuban revolution. As Ruth Behar writes, Cuba has "attempted to redeem an emasculated nation" by creating a "new man," a figure based on the writings of Che Guevara (Behar ("Introduction" 12). She adds: "nothing has ever seemed to threaten the utopia of new men more terribly than homosexuality" ("Introduction" 12). In fact, as Rich and Arguelles note, in past decades, homosexuals in Cuba have been subject to "re-education" camps, imprisonment, deportation and policies requiring the mandatory isolation of individuals who test HIV positive. Beginning in the 1980s, right-wing exile groups actively campaigned to denounce Castro by denouncing the homophobia of the Cuban government, an issue that proves especially problematic for progressive Cuban Americans torn between

respect for Castro's policies of social reform and the experiences of homosexuals on the island. Homophobia is hardly a direct product of socialism, despite the claims of exile groups who have manipulated the experience of homosexuals on the island for their own ends. Homophobia on the island certainly predates the revolution and continues to pervade exile Miami culture --details the exile lobby groups conveniently forget in their need to implement a "propaganda war against the Cuban Revolution" ("Homosexuality, Homophobia and Revolution" 121).

Achy Obejas, a lesbian Cuban American journalist, fiction writer and poet whose work appears in Bridges, Obejas challenges the hyper-masculine posturing of machismo as highly homoerotic--an observation which would surely raise a few hackles in both Miami and Cuba. In the short story, "Above All, A Family Man," Rogelio, one of the main characters, does not consider himself gay, which in Latin America is defined as strictly as a matter of "effeminacy." As Rogelio's lover Tommy, reports, Rogelio instead "thinks of himself as sexual, as capable of sex with a cantaloupe as with a woman or a man. It's a definition that deals in quantity" (We Came All The Way From Cuba 53). Tommy knows there is an "absurdity" in Rogelio's "pretending he's so hypermasculine when he's scratching at my door" (We Came All The Way From Cuba 55). When Tommy discovers he is HIV positive, Rogelio wants to avenge his "honor." They come to fists, with Tommy yelling: "You can marry Miss Mexico and have a million little Third World babies, and it won't keep your cock from going up every time you're with a man, motherfucker! I've seen you!" (We Came All The Way From Cuba 57).

In the Bridges essay "Political and Cultural Cross-Dressing," Flavio Risech describes that as a young adolescent he understood his precarious position in the exile community with its requirement of unambiguous masculine heterosexuality. Flavio Risech

growing up in exile Miami as rather like living behind enemy lines. Like gay men everywhere, he "cloaked [his] emerging sexual desire for other men beneath an intricately tailored suit that read unequivocally, as heterosexual" ("Cross-Dressing" 62). Risech lived in fear that a "little lisp" or a "barely discernible bend of the wrist" would give him away. "I would be stripped of my strait clothing, a *maricón* standing naked for all to see" ("Cross-Dressing" 63).

In "Political and Cultural Cross-Dressing," he employs the metaphor of "cross-dressing," of course, to describe the requirement of subterfuge and to suggest the ambiguity of gendered identities, that is, as a comment on the complex construction of gender and sexuality. He employs the term "cross-dressing" to describe the transgression of gender categories and fore-ground the ambiguities of gendered identity and the complexity of human sexual identity. But he also extends the idea of cross-dressing to examine the complexities of racial, cultural, national and political identity as performance.

He argues that Cuban Americans have a "wide array of identity garments," at our disposal, that is, multiple cultural "attributes" acquired by living in the "distinct communities" of Cuba, exile Miami and, in many cases, in other U.S. cities (in exile from exile). Moreover, he describes the need to "cross-dress" as we traverse between subtle borders, making crucial "coded" decisions about how to "present ourselves, about what part of our identity to wear proudly or keep 'closeted.'" Transgression is not without its perils as there are strict taboos or high costs associated with presenting oneself in certain kinds of 'garb'" ("Cross-Dressing" 58).

Risech extends the notion of cultural cross-dressing term to the political realm. He dresses himself politically, so to speak, as the occasion allows. For instance, he wears his "left political 'accessories'" only when he is not in Miami, as he understands the dangers of

appearing in public in political "drag," a phrase that echoes the association of leftist political leanings with homosexuality in the exile press ("Cross-Dressing" 64). In Massachusetts, he is free to "wear the left political styles [he] looked good in" (63). He returns to Miami only occasionally, crossing the border into *la sagüesera*, where he must again "dress" carefully. Though he no longer cloaks his sexual orientation, at least not in his writing, his political orientation continues to cause him considerable trouble. "My wearing of my . . . Cuban cultural trappings without my tailored left political 'accessories' is tolerable only for short periods. I have learned the hard way the futility of arguing against the right-wing grain, of presenting myself in the political 'drag' that has become so much a part of my being in Massachusetts" ("Cross-Dressing" 64).

Flavio Risech, like many other second-generation Cuban Americans, initially returns to the island in search of a sense of "belonging" or "homecoming," a naive, if understandable impulse (60, 59). He quickly realizes, however, that such a reconciliation would have (re)enacted the proverbial return of prodigal son—a narrative structure that would certainly "have resolved his split sense of self" but which would have required that he "repentantly surrender his deviancy" as he is reinserted into a "normative family" model ("Cross-Dressing" 59).

For Risech, traveling to Cuba provides some answers to his questions of identity, but it hardly provides simple resolutions. Gay and progressive, he feels horribly alienated in exile Miami, but he finds that he hardly feels at home on the island, either. Caught between powerful "contending discourses" (64), he resides at the cross-hairs of several rigid world views. He must often attempt to maneuver a "political mine field," that is, the rabid "anti-communist cant" of his family, the North American left's "insufficiently critical,

single-minded defense of the revolution" and the often "impenetrable" party-line positions of many officials on the island ("Cross-Dressing" 64).

For Risech, returning to Cuba does not provide the uncomplicated homecoming our parents have so often envisioned – it complicates his sense of self. In fact, the trip engenders a crisis of identity echoed by other Cuban American writers, who suddenly discover that we "neither feel nor are perceived as being quite as Cuban nor as American as we imagined ourselves to be" ("Cross-Dressing" 58). Much to Risech's dismay, children on the island mistake him for a Russian because of his light complexion and expensive clothes. Clearly shaken, he writes: "I am not seen as Cuban" ("Cross-Dressing" 59). He is seen as a "foreigner" in the place of his birth—a fact that renders essentialist notions of nationality utterly useless. Risech's predicament reveals that national identity, like gendered and racial identities, are made not born. They are socially constructed and therefore relative and dynamic—hardly static delineations.

Risech is forced to negotiate not only political minefields, but codes of racial identity. In fact, he "changes race" as he arrives in Cuba, a surreal proposition. Risech reports his transformation with some amazement, reporting that only a profoundly coded *cambio de piel*, a kind of cross-dressing or shifting between two different constructs of race, could make it possible for him "to be a *blanquito* there and a Latino, and, therefore, something of a 'person of color' here" ("Cross-Dressing" 59). In short, Risech's trip to Cuba hardly reconciles his split sense of self, but, rather, further problematizes it.

Risech ultimately accepts the conflicts of his identity as ultimately "irreconcilable," but he also begins to consider that "owning these multiple and shifting identities is really an asset rather than a problem" (69). In doing so, he begins to carve out a complex self-definition that does not participate in the either/or dichotomy of Cold War constructions of

self, but which employs ideas of a new "border identity." In fact, Risech claims for Cuban Americans who write from disruptive positions Anzaldua's term *artravesados*—a word which implies not only being in the middle, but actually in the way, stubborn, insolent, "perversely" unapologetic. It has a far more dangerous connotation than the term *atrevidos*. Flavio Risech borrows the term *atravesados* to describe those Cuban American writers who broach boundaries and straddle borders of nation, race and/or gender. "We are *los atravesados*, for whom crossing the border at once means defiance . . . and reconciliation . . . In short the crossing itself is a political act" ("Cross-Dressing" 69). *Ataravesados* defy and disrupt geo-political, artistic and emotional borders between Cubans on both sides of the Florida Straits—the ninety-mile border that represents more than a geographic feature or boundary. This "disjunctive metaphor" also serves to represent the "ideological chasm" between Cubans that has remained as "fixed as the Berlin Wall," an oddly hopeful image now that the Wall has been reduced to rubble ("Cross-Dressing" 58)

Lourdes Casal decided she was "too *habanera* to be *newyorquina*" and too "*newyorquina* to be . . . anything else" ("For Ana Velford," *Bridges* 22). Risech, however, decides he can be both and neither, that the very definitions of national identity are fictions. Risech acknowledges that he will never feel comfortable "negotiating shifts of identity" that occur each time he crosses the internal and external boundaries that separate Cuba from Miami and Miami from the rest of the United States. He concludes that he does not transgress these boundaries as a "political exile looking to go home" or as a "hyphenated American" seeking to assimilate into the dominant U.S. culture. As such, Risech's work represents the Cuban American transition from "exile" to "ethnic," a sense of identity whose whole exceeds the sum of its parts. In the end, Risech concludes that he lives on

several simultaneous borders, belonging fully to no nation, but deeply connected to several.

Éstos Americanos lo Tuersen Todo

Finally, the work of Puentes authors like Coco Fusco, Cristina García and others differs from exile-identified writing in terms of how they define themselves in relation to Anglo-American culture. "The fact is that Cuba and its diaspora are always defined within a U.S. framework Indeed, after the revolution, the nation split apart precisely between those who stayed, to live with their backs turned to the great power to the North, and those who left and took refuge in the belly of the beast" (Behar, "Introduction" 1).

Eliana Rivero argues that for most U.S. Latinos the emergence of bilingual literature signals "an established consciousness of minority status" ("Sugarcane Memories" 173). But Pérez Firmat, for instance, prefers to think of Cuban American culture as characterized "more by continuity than conflict" with the larger Anglo culture (Life on the Hyphen 6). "Contemporary models of culture contact tend to be oppositional But the oppositional model, accurate as it may be in other situations, does not do justice to the balance of power in Cuban America" (Life on the Hyphen 6). Indeed, he theorizes Cuban American culture as specifically "appositional rather than oppositional" (Life on the Hyphen 6). In "My Life as a Redneck," he reports blending in a honky-tonk where the band "sang happy birthday to a man identified only as the Imperial Wizard of Chiefland" (Iguana Dreams 232). He enjoyed himself without incident, "since I don't look particularly Cuban" and since his girlfriend Catherine "looks especially American" (Iguana Dreams 234).

More Cubans live in Miami than in any other city in the world except Havana; the city's ethnic enclave has provided a measure of insulation from the dominant culture. Cubans have achieved a measure of political and economic power in South Florida. As a

result, many Cuban Americans are spared considering their color in a larger Anglo-American context. As Jesse Monteagudo puts it, in Miami we "seldom had to deal with the problem of belonging to an ethnic minority. Where I lived, we were the majority" ("Miami, Florida" 780). In Next Year in Cuba, Pérez Firmat, too, claims he cannot recall a single instance of feeling discriminated against in his life (70). In the next page, however, he describes how a group of "gringo" football players nearly thrashed him in high school. "It would have been like the Spanish-American War all over again" (72). As an adult in Chapel Hill, where he teaches, he is shocked to discover that someone has written "Go home spic" on his mailbox, momentarily convinced the note was meant for someone else.

Pérez Firmat's idea a "Cuban America" denies the racism that many Cuban Americans have experienced in the United States. Cubans arriving in Florida in the late 1950s and early 1960s experienced marked discrimination (Olson and Olson 43). "In fact, many Florida whites were especially anti-Cuban" (Olson and Olson 43). Cuban children were prohibited from speaking Spanish in the public schools, even during lunch and recess. "Drop out rates were high and poverty severe . . . such phrases as 'Cubans need not apply' became all too common" (Olson and Olson 43).

Achy Obejas describes the experiences of a Cuban family who arrived in Miami in States in the late 1960s in less than enviable terms. "There are things that can't be told. Things like when we couldn't find an apartment. Things like doing poorly on an I.Q. test because I didn't speak English. Things like North American hairdressers telling my mom they didn't do "her kind of hair." ("We Came All The Way From Cuba" 123) Even in Miami and even after the Cuban community achieved institutional and economic power, it is difficult to conceive of Cuban American culture as defined by "continuity

rather than conflict" with the larger Anglo community as Pérez Firmat asserts. Anglos in South Florida have long "accused Cubans of trying to take over the city" and the demographic changes engendered by the flood of Cuban immigrants "produced a 'white flight' to cities north of Dade County" (*Havana USA* 88). Non-Cubans complained that Cubans refused to "dissolve into the proverbial melting pot as according to family lore their won grandparents had It was an irritating reminder to non-Cubans that their city was changing" (*Havana USA* 89). And the English Only Movement, a grass-roots organization employing a painfully racist and xenophobic rhetoric, was born in Dade County in the 1980s, just after the Mariel influx.

The Miami exile community itself has been accused of persistent and pervasive racism. The FCC has received numerous complaints about the racism of its radio commentators (*Havana USA* 107). Many of the Miami riots of the last decades have been attributed to long-standing tensions between the African-American community and the Cuban American community. As one black Overtown resident put it: "The Cubans get everything" (*Havana USA* 105).

And while the visible presence of Cubans in Miami has helped create a vibrant "gateway to the Americas" both commercially and culturally, many other *Caribeños* and *Latino Americanos* find the city unwelcoming. As one Puerto Rican resident put it, "you'd think that damn island [Cuba] was the center of the universe" (*Havana USA* 107). Pérez Firmat defines Cuban American culture in ways which carefully distance it from other Latino and Latin American groups. "I must confess. I miss the 'old' Miami where every Hispanic that you met was certain to be Cuban. Now I can no longer go into a gas station and address the attendant with the familiarity that Cubans habitually use with one

another. He might be Nicaraguan . . . these days you have to feel the territory out and act accordingly" (Next Year in Cuba 88).

Many Cuban exiles perceive themselves as "different" (read: better) than other Latin Americans immigrants--many of whom have arrived under far worse circumstances of political persecution. Cubans attempt to distance themselves from other Latinos. As Cherrie Moraga writes: "The more European the heritage and the higher the class status, the more closely Latinos identify with the powers that be. They vote Republican . . . They applaud George Bush for bringing 'peace' to Nicaragua. They hope he'll one day do the same for Cuba so they can return to their *patria* and live a 'North American-style' consumer life ("Art in America" 302). In her Bridges interview, Cristina García, too, comments on the "superiority complex" of the Cuban exile community. "Growing up I definitely sensed that Cubans felt they were better than the Puerto Ricans and the Dominicans," a sentiment she consciously considers in the development of characters Like Lourdes ("And There is Only Our Imagination" 110)

While Pérez Firmat's work remains overtly assimilationist, the literature of many Puentes writers defines itself against the larger U.S. culture. In Bridges interview, author Cristina García explains that she identifies with Chicano and Puerto Rican writers who "define their art and literature as a form of cultural resistance and protest" ("And There is Only Our Imagination" 110). García argues that Cuban Americans will not dissolve in the mythological "melting pot," but that the literature will challenge Anglo-America by re-defining it. "We'll be part of the mainstream not by becoming more like 'them' and less like 'us' but by changing which it means to be an American" ("And There is Only Our Imagination" 110).

Many of the Puentes writers, marked as "other" by skin color, by gender, by politics, have no illusions about assimilation. María de los Angeles Torres, for instance, grew up isolated in middle America and so, she experienced the consequences of her ethnicity in a larger American context. In fact, she finds and her family did not fit into binary North American racial categories--hardly an enviable position, especially for a child of six. She recalls stopping in a gas station somewhere in the South where "we were not allowed to drink water. There were two fountains, one for 'only whites,' the other for 'coloreds' (which had been crossed out and replaced by 'niggers'). We didn't fit . . . into either of the categories. We left thirsty" ("Beyond the Rupture" 28). Cuban immigrant families of the Cold-War period were hailed as heroes of anti-communism--proof that communism was evil. But when Kennedy was killed, school children taunted her: "'You dirty Cubans, You killed our President.'" Already understanding the divisions between "good" Cubans (refugees) and "bad" Cubans (communists), Torres screamed back "we were not those kind of Cubans" ("Beyond the Rupture" 26). But to her distress, she found that the world-view that "was supposed to explain the dislocation from our homeland . . . shattered before our very eyes as the champions of anti-communism also wanted to run us out of town . . . the geographic and political boundaries which had so restructured our entire lives and redefined our realities meant little to those who only saw 'dirty Cubans'" ("Beyond the Rupture" 28, 27).

Pérez Firmat would have us believe in a Cuban America where Hispanidad "advances deeper into the American heartland" that loves Lucy and listens to Gloria Estefan (Life on the Hyphen 20). But for many, assimilation means annihilation. As Torres puts it, in order to "survive in the United States and to lay claim to my identity as

a Cuban and as a Latina. . . . I have to fight for political space every day" ("Beyond the Rupture" 35). She does not have the luxury of remaining a-positional.

Torres' childhood experiences in the "heartland" of America exposes race and ethnicity as constructions, fictions that for most generally perform seamlessly until one actually transgresses ideological boundaries borders. Like Flavio Risech, Torres experiences a strange "*cambio de piel*" when she again crosses borders, traveling to Cuba as an adult with complex and controversial political convictions. "I am 'white' when I wake up in Havana, but I am other because of my migratory experience. . . . I am again 'other' when I journey the thirty minutes through airspace to Miami, because . . . my commitment to return to Cuba . . . makes me politically 'other' among Miami Cubans. I arrive in Chicago, and again I am 'other,' now because I am a Latina in a city that is defined in black and white" ("Beyond the Rupture" 36). Maria de los Angeles Torres, however, concludes: "Every time I return across time and space, between cultures and economic systems, I am more convinced that I do not want or need to accept the either/or definition of my identity which demands that I choose sides. My identity is far more complex . . . I now understand that I do not have to accept categories which split who I am" ("Beyond the Rupture" 36).

Puente writers fully belong to that generation of younger writers who in words of Eliana Rivero, "are in the midst of effecting a transition from emigre/exile categories to that of ethnic minorities" ("Sugarcane Memories" 176). They align themselves with other marginalized U.S. Latinos and write against the dominant Anglo cultural grain, often by drawing from the work of radical Chicano and Puerto Rican authors and post-colonial theorists.

In fact, several Puentes writers report having been radicalized by contact with other U.S. Latinos--particularly Chicano activists--in the 1960s and 1970s. From living in Mexico, Ruth Behar "brought back the concept that [a] border with the United States is an open wound," a phrase again from Anzaldua's Borderlands. ("Introduction" 7). Maria de los Angeles Torres describes a period of "politization" that occurred specifically "via the Chicano movement" and through her contact with members of Puerto Rican socialist organizations that had "inclusive" notions of Latino identity and a "Latin American perspective on the world" ("Beyond the Rupture" 29). Torres resists the idea of Cuban exceptionalism, which marks Cubans as "different" from other U.S. Latino groups, as she concludes: "I am a member of a broader Latin American community in the United States, for I live and struggle with *Mejicanos*, *Puertorriqueños*, and *Centro-americanos*" ("Beyond the Rupture" 35).

Similarly, in the Bridges essay "Fronterisleña,' Border Islander," Eliana Rivero writes that she studied Mexican American and Nuyoricans poets and writers and lived through the "Chicano cultural renaissance" before the existence of a collections of Cuban American literature (Bridges 241). The field of Latino studies did not even have a name when she began lecturing. In the early 1980s, Eliana Rivero began collecting the work of Cuban American and studying them alongside the work of Chicana and Puerto Rican authors. She has come to understand that like other U.S. minorities, "we U.S. Cubans are border people and border entities . . . within the national political panorama, within the U.S. Latina/o cultural landscape, and sometimes even within our own ethno-national subgroup" ("Fronterisleña" 342). Eliana Rivero points out that Cuban Americans share many similarities with other ethnic minorities, including the experience of bi-culturation and dislocation. Rivero rejects the potential "neutrality of Hispanismo." Instead, she has

forged a full-fledged "consciousness" of bicultural identity, a "hybridism" which young Cuban Americans "share with other ethnic minorities" ("*Fronterisleña*" 342, 343).

In *We Came All The Way From Cuba So You Could Dress Like That?* Achy Obejas writes not only about Cuban American culture, but about the experiences of Chicanos and Chicanas. In "Sugarcane," she elaborates a pan-Caribbean identity, acknowledging a shared history and honoring the African contribution to Dominican, Puerto Rican and Cuban culture--a link where you "can't cut the blood/lines from this island" (*Woman of her Word* 48 - 49). A part of the generation in the process of shifting from exile identity to that of ethnic minorities, Obejas describes the experience of Latinos as a shared experience of marginalization and survival. "Sugarcane," you "can't cut/cut the cane . . . dig it down to the/roots sprouting spray paint on the/walls of the hard cold city." Her poem provides the vision of a complex, transnational ethnic community which not only survives in the U.S. but reinvents itself, resisting assimilation by developing a strong sense of ethnic, rather than national, identity "one by one throwing off/the chains *siguaraya/in cuba y borinquen no/se pue'en parar*" (*Woman of her Word* 48 - 49).

While Pérez Firmat and other exile-identified authors write to draw a distance between themselves and other U.S. Latinos, Obejas and other bridge writers links Cubans to Puerto Ricans, Chicanos and blacks in her work by stressing their shared--though often ignored--socio-historical realities. Bridge writers understand that all U.S. Latinos, regardless of race or class, ultimately share the same lot. Our parent's may have believed the myth of the "golden exile," an odd phrase that connotes not only wealth but certain strange yellow paleness, but younger Cuban Americans can hardly afford such illusions. Today, Cubans are intercepted at sea and repatriated like other *mojados* or "wetbacks," no different than other Caribbean or Latin American immigrants--at least until their feet

touch land, at which point Cubans are entitled to apply for asylum, a privilege not extended to Mexicans, Haitians or any other immigrant group.

Many young Cuban Americans have begun to question the possibility or desirability of assimilating into Anglo-American. No matter how flawless my English, I will never escape the stereotypes engraved in the American popular imagination of the Latina as whore, domestic, criminal. Men ask me for "Spanish" lessons and smirk. My first roommate in graduate school, a reasonably intelligent woman from Virginia, was horrified when she heard me speaking Spanish on the phone and asked me: "Don't your parent's speak English?" When I first told her I was from Miami, she smiled without showing any teeth and said she preferred cash for the rent--up front.

Clearly, for many Cuban American writers, the nostalgia narratives "ever present in the parent generation" has begun to "give way to a split, hybrid cultural consciousness in the sons and daughters of exiles" ("Sugarcane Memories" 181). But exile-identified Cuban American authors continue in the vein of the Cuban exile literature, particularly the Castro fixation and in the attempt to preserve a "traditional" Cuban values. They write to reify the paternalistic values of a dying world. They distance themselves from other U.S. Latina/os and seek to assimilate into Anglo-American culture, even while clinging to an "exile consciousness" and its familiar, false comfort of clear categories of "us" and "them." Their writing representing a last-ditch literary effort to remain "golden exiles" in a world of *mojados*--an endless borderland where nothing is fixed, where nothing is sure and where security is little more than superstition.

Puente authors, on the other hand, abandon fixed Cold War construction of identity and accept the ambiguities, dangers and pleasures of border-life. Marked as "other" in terms of race, gender or politics and marginalized within the exile community,

these *atravesados* move beyond borders, writing across the Florida Straits, disrupting boundaries on many levels. They find no easy answers, no homecoming, but they do manage to make find some sense of integration and community. They, too, look to the past to make sense of their history, but do not remain in the nostalgia narrative. Indeed, they defy the exile lobby and return to the island in an effort to uncover the aspects of their lost histories. These Cuban American writers, like Cristina García, Ruth Behar, Achy Obejas, Flavio Rísech and Coco Fusco lead a new generation of Cuban American writers as they move from exile to ethnic writing. In facing their past in the present, they manage to reconcile themselves to a degree, or rather, find peace with the irreconcilable nature of border-life.

Los atravesados—the queer, the *mala hembra*, the perverse, the stubborn, the insolent, the ingrate—have clearly begun to consider themselves as ethnics rather than exiles. They defy borders, moving away from nostalgia narratives. This process of "establishing themselves in the multicultural U.S. literary scene has just begun to happen" so Cuban American writers continue to struggle to "deconstruct a former, proscribed way of being" in order to create in "their vital experience and memories" an entirely new discourse ("Sugarcane Memories" 180). These Cuban American writers do not participate in the arrested nostalgia narrative, but instead re-write themselves and history, challenging dying and dangerous structures of thought. They take risks, both in their writing and in the flesh, and have helped to herald in an age of hope, perhaps of healing. We have begun to walk away from the rhetoric of exile politics. As Maria de los Angeles Torres writes: "I am comforted in knowing that no matter how hard the states try, they can not legislate . . . identities; they can not erase our history" ("Beyond the Rupture" 42).

Young people on both sides of the island are calling for change with sane, moderate voices.

On both sides of the Straits, our old mad blind despised and dying kings continue to posture, rattling their swords. The U.S. has tightened its embargo around the island. The exile press predicts a blood bath on the island. My father grows angrier still, and I am tempted to write that nothing changes. But when I began writing this manuscript, I knew there was a cousin, a young woman my age named Elena after my great grandmother who was waiting for me in Baracoa, waiting for me to find my courage to meet her. I tried several times to go. Twice I changed my mind. Another time, I told my parents I was going to Europe and drove all the way to Tampico, Mexico with a group headed for the island, only to be turned back by a Cuban dignitary who refused to let me on the plane because no one in the group could vouch for my political pedigree.

The next year, I returned with the same group, my leftist political leanings well established, and finally arrived on the forbidden island of my inherited memories. I even managed to get to Baracoa, a remote town on the eastern-most part of the island, famously difficult to travel to. I finally arrived at Elena's door, sweaty, exhausted and feeling as if I were having an extended out-of-body experience. Elena and my aunts recognized me instantly and welcomed me warmly into their home. I had feared the moment. After all, what could we say to one another, sitting there, clutching our coffee, as I have so often done with other women who have helped me unravel myself? With my pocket-full of dollars and my North American experience, I was alien to her. But Elena and I share a grandmother and a great grandmother--that obdurate Rosa Elena Castro with her small, quick hands as gifted in nursing plants as snapping chickens' necks.

So we began with her, casually, as Elena showed me Abuela Rosa's old room. As we talked, we discovered that Abuela Rosa had tortured girl-children in two countries with her strange warnings ("Don't run around barefoot, you'll go sterile"!) and heretical hints ("A spring of parsley, inserted in the cervix, will induce a miscarriage"). And of course, we recalled her favorite saying. "*Mas se perdio en la guerra,*" though which war she meant, we will never know. Abuela Rosa was born before the turn of the century, weighing only three pounds, during the last year of the last war of independence. She lived through a dozen American military interventions, a near civil war, a revolution, a missile crisis and an exodus. But she seemed to stand there between Elena and me, brown and round and bent--reminding us that the women in my family live well over one hundred, so we would have plenty of time to make these discoveries. And so my cousin and I began a conversation that has extended over many years now, which began with our grandmother and but which has developed a depth primarily in our shared affinity as professional women with a love for literature. I count our relationship as one of my most significant accomplishments of my life. For a family split at the root, separated along ideological and emotional bloodlines, a "collective understanding, a recognition to heal may still be the only way to . . . begin reconciling with our enemies--ourselves" (Torres, "Beyond the Rupture" 42).

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

In this study, I examine the ways in which Cuban American identity has been imagined in acutely gendered terms, including the language of familial and romantic love, honor and sexual violence in a neo-colonial North American context. I investigate the complex intersections of gender, race, class and nation simultaneously to trace the contours of Cuban American exile-national and ethnic-minority literature and identity, beginning with authors of the nineteenth-century Cuban communities in the United States. This complex constellation of poets, critics and fiction writers exhibit a distinct sense of dual cultural identity, often, though not exclusively, marked by the use of English.

Despite two hundred years of Cuban communities in the United States, I find that the publication and study of Cuban American literature has been dominated by a particular set of authors who arrived in the States as children or young teenagers after the 1959 Cuban revolution. The work of exile-identified Cuban American authors, whose work has dominated the publishing field, clearly articulates a complex biculturated sense of self. But, their work also equates "authentic" Cuban American identity with an uncomplicated and heavy-handed anti-Castro position. These largely exile-identified authors like Gustavo Pérez Firmat and Ricardo Pau-Llosa continue in the vein of earlier Cuban exile literature, particularly their attempt to preserve a set of "traditional" Cuban values. Like earlier Cuban exile writers, they have continued to define Cuban American literature and culture in dangerous and damaging nationalist terms. In effect, their work is

complicit in a reactionary Cold-War politics that continues to separate Cubans in the U.S. and on the island.

Moreover, to a shocking degree, the narratives and coming-of-age memoirs of authors like Gustavo Pérez Firmat persist in the acutely gendered dimensions of Cuban exile national politics, even as they construct a complex sense of biculturated self. Pérez Firmat, especially, equates Cuban American-ness with an explicit exile sensibility predicated on access to racially classified women's bodies. In these contemporary exile-identified Cuban American texts, identity continues to be written in troubling eighteenth and nineteenth-century terms, that is, in terms of women's racially classified bodies, romantic and familial metaphors, paternalistic codes of honor and other gendered narrative strategies with a long and troubling tradition. Early nationalist figures like the sexualized *mulata* resurface in exile-identified Cuban American literature.

Their work also evidences a distinct worldview that considers Cubans "different" from other Latino groups and which ignores marginalization of Hispanic groups. In other words, exile-identified writers do not consider themselves minority writers, but adhere to an idea of Cuban exceptionalism. Their work represents an effort to remain "golden exiles" in a world of *mojados*.

However, important if underrepresented ethnic-identified writers like Ruth Behar have recently begun to emerge. Their poetry and prose differs most notably from exile-identified Cuban American writing in terms of the manner in which the author positions his or her self in relation to other U.S. Hispanic groups and the dominant Anglo-American culture. Cuban American authors like Lourdes Casal, Coco Fusco, Achy Obejas and Flavio Rísech refuse to configure identity in exile-nationalist terms. Rather, they pose complex identities based on minority identity politics and border studies.

Recent events like the Elián Gonzalez case, in many ways, reveal the shifting racial/ethnic position of Cubans in the post-Cold War world. Certainly, the disproportionate attention and the expenditure of considerable public and private resources the case generated suggest that Cuba continues to hold a potent place in the American imagination. The defiant little island nation, just 90 miles away, continues to thwart our manifest destiny. For generations raised with school room air-raid drills and missile-crisis bomb shelters, Cuba still wields a kind of irrational power to inspire gut-level fear and jingoism. We will trade with China and with Vietnam--a nation with which we went to war at the cost of 60,000 American lives. And yet, we will not trade with Cuba. And so, in many ways, the Cold War approaches to Cuba are still with us.

However, reactions to the case across the country Cubans are no longer seen as "exceptional," provisionally white golden exiles--but members of a suspect internal banana republic like any other. The case reveals that the position evident in exile-identified texts, which describe Cubans as different, that is, better than other Latin American groups, has become increasingly untenable or irrelevant. The case reveals that the ethnic-minority position evident in the bridge writers I examine more accurately reflects the complex, shifting position of Cuban Americans in the United States. In fact, during the case, anti-immigrant rhetoric more often associated with other Latin American groups escalated against the Miami Cuban Community. According to Alejandro Portes, a professor at Princeton, during the case, young Cuban Americans, many accustomed to thinking of themselves as model American could, for the first time, "hear what the outside world [was] saying about them and it shocked them. . . . This [was] a defining moment in the Cuban exile experience. It is as big as Bay of Pigs, as big as Mariel" (qtd. in Santiago and Dorshner 4B).

The case also reveals the ways in which many of the gendered literary tropes I examine continue to circulate in cultural and public policy texts, particularly the force of appeals to metaphors of suffering mothers to legitimate political processes in a remarkable range of nationalist contexts--socialist, exile-national and U.S. anti-immigrant. Conflicted and racially coded images of women as maternal/sacred and animalistic/monstrous continue to shape public debates, mobilizing groups in significant ways and articulating state, federal and foreign policies and actions.

Again, Cuban and Cuban American identity became constructed in terms that foreground women's reproductive bodies, often in ways which employ categories of sacred/monstrous maternity. Certainly, the sanctity of maternity was appealed to on both sides of the issue. Newsweek journalist Anne Quindlen objected to Juan Miguel's forcible separation from his son by declaring: "They would never have dared do this to a mother" ("The Sins of the Father" 82). Arguments to keep the boy here claimed a special bond between Elián and his second cousin Marisleysis Gonzalez--his "surrogate" mother. But, in fact the case celebrated painfully young mothers and suffering or dead mothers. Sacred maternity became quickly destabilized as monstrous in the case, with Marisylexis Gonzalez' becoming the harlot hysteric in the hands of those who wanted the boy returned to his father.

In fact, the case showed that debates about the boy's "rightful" place in the world represented larger, primary anxieties about paternal privilege and the authority of the white father at the head of the "family of man." Maternal metaphors mobilized hundreds of thousands of Cubans in Miami. But in the end, Juan Miguel's legal rights as a father--punctuated by the force of a federal raid--easily and permanently outgunned abstract, though heated, claims to "maternal" rights to the boy.

In my study of nineteenth-century texts like Mary Peabody Mann's Juanita, I discovered that racially marked maternal metaphors served shifting purposes – both ameliorating and intensifying American fears about the brown hordes to the south. In the Elián Gonzalez case, too, maternal metaphors served to frame anxieties about the sensuous, prolific and irrational brown hordes within our borders. To some degree, images of a "pixie" Elián, like Ricky Martin (born Enrique Morales) and Little Ricky Ricardo before him, served to ameliorate such fears. But discussions about the boy also revealed considerable anti-Hispanic sentiment, despite, or perhaps because of the Buena Vista socialization of American popular culture, that is, the popularity of Latino music and cultural productions in mainstream fields. Indeed, it was not without notice that George "W." Bush, in his singularly strange grasp of the English language, continually mispronounced Elián's name as "Alien." Certainly, the Elián Gonzalez case arrived at a peculiar period. During the late the 1990s, politicians from bell-weather states were busily passing anti-immigrant legislation while simultaneously holding up their "little brown ones" in an effort to win the middle-class Hispanic vote. Newspapers had already begun to predict, rather ominously, that Latinos would soon become the largest ethnic minority in the U.S., a prediction which has since officially come to pass. In this context, the case revealed the fact that Cuban Americans occupy an ambiguous racial/ethnic position--at once assimilable and exotic, white and not white

Mother of Sorrows

The language of the family operated centrally in Elián Gonzalez case. As Granma International reported, in a speech delivered to Young Pioneers in Havana during a march to demand the return of Elián Gonzalez, Fidel Castro described the revolution as a modern family which provides for its children. "The Revolution is dedicated first and

foremost to helping children and mothers, to helping the family" (March 4, 2000). When Juan Miguel Gonzalez arrived in Washington with his wife and infant son beside him, he asserted his paternal rights and the primacy of the nuclear family, declaring: "This is Elián's true family" (Weaver, "I Hope Soon to Embrace My Son" 1A). In a series of ideological back-bends, conservatives who wanted the boy to stay in the U.S. and who typically mouthed "family values" suddenly acknowledged that the "sacred" bond of blood could be superseded by, horror of horrors, the state. Like the Cold Warriors of the 50s, many who wanted Elián to stay in the U.S. insisted that Communism destroyed family life and that "true" family life could prevail only in a capitalist democracy or rather, the consumer-oriented home, or as one placard put it: "Freedom Supercedes Fatherhood." In this equation, Juan Miguel—an active Party member—did not qualify as a 'real' father. On the left, many who would be hard pressed to defend the primacy of biological claims found a new faith in fatherhood.

The Elián case sat at the crosshairs between the "private" and the "public." The modern social contract state is founded on the illusion of separate private and public spheres, a belief Reno echoed when she defended her decision to return Elián. "It is not our place to punish a father for his political beliefs or where he wants to raise his child. Indeed, if we were to start judging parents on the basis of their political beliefs, it would change the concept of family for the rest of time" (Davies, "Reno Rejects Comparisons to Waco" 23A). However, the private and the public are historically and metaphorically linked. In fact, the very Enlightenment ideals on which the modern social contract state is grounded describe the nation as an expanded model of the family. Our most intimate relations and acts are shaped by institutional, ideological, historical and cultural forces. And for all the talk of sacred bonds, the family is fraught with sexual politics of the most

primal kind--perhaps one reason why Elián wagging his oedipal finger at his father in that now-infamous "hostage" tape unsettled so many. (In the last months of the case, the Gonzalez family released a video of Elián sitting on a bed and angrily telling his father he wanted to stay in Miami. The tape, which showed the boy nervously looking off camera, was so disturbing that it quickly became known as "the hostage video.")

Familial metaphors may have lent the Elián Gonzalez case a sense of narrative unity, but the case itself provoked considerable family tension. "Publicly, many Cubans were defending the boy's right to stay in this country, but privately, families were being torn apart" (Obejas, "Betraying Elián" 50). The cousins who found Elián were at each others' throats in no time. Lázaro Gonzalez and his brother Delphin, who felt the boy belonged with his father, have not spoken in several years now. The dynamics of this case remind us of the tenuous and arbitrary ties which bind us by "blood" to what seem like perfect strangers at times, if not actually enemies.

Martí employed the idea of the suffering mother to advance the cause of Cuban independence and to unify and mobilize Cuban revolutionaries. During the Elián case, too, maternal suffering was celebrated. Elián's martyr-mother Elizabet would also be coded in the language of sacred maternity--a maternity based on deep suffering and death. She was said to have "ransomed" Elián's "freedom in blood." Moreover, Elizabet had had, according to friends in Cardenas, "several" miscarriages before she carried Elián to term. Those several miscarriages, which had morphed into a magical seven miscarriages by the time the story crested in Miami, were spoken of with reverence as a sign of Elián's "special" purpose. Elián's birth was thus marked by "special" circumstances and signs--in this case, exceptional suffering. We have here no virgin birth, but a brutal series of non-births.

Language employed in the case celebrated maternal suffering and teenage motherhood, but demonized childless women and women beyond child-birthing age, who became monstrous by virtue of not having children. Elián's grandmothers, "more Granma than grandma," as one commentator put it, were said to have arrived in the U.S. "looking as if they'd like to knock a few people in the head with their handbags" (Bartholet and Beals, "Grandma Diplomacy" 32). Janet Reno, who Elián referred to as "that old woman" in the hostage video, was vilified in the exile community not only as a Judas, but as a "witch" or a crone. Miami exile protesters represented her as an "unnatural" woman. Placards in Miami depicted her as a demon with horns and a pointed beard. Sister Jeanne O'Laughlin, the nun who mediated the meeting between Elián and his grandmothers, was depicted variously as an ineffective, meddling old biddy and/or a sly, treacherous agent of the U.S. government. (She is accused of feigning neutrality only to encourage Elián's grandmothers to defect to the U.S.)

In the Elián Gonzalez case, representations of mothers teeter between the sacred and the monstrous. In the case, representations of mothers are both everywhere and nowhere, that is, simultaneously present and absent--endlessly spoken of, but rarely speaking subjects. While metaphorical mothers circulated in the Elián case, material mothers seemed missing or marked by absence. Elián's "mysterious" biological mother, Elisabeth, was referred to intermittently--but with little agency, either as martyr or a pawn who was bullied by her boyfriend into taking to the sea. Elián's step mother, apparently, is no mother at all. Once Elián was removed from the Miami relatives' home and placed with his father in Washington, Dan Rather asked: "Now there is no mother figure, so are they going to bring the grandmothers from Cuba?" Angela Gonzalez, Marisleysis' "shy" mother, remained barely visible and utterly silent throughout the

prolonged siege of her home. In the end, she spoke only to say she had "no words" (Garcia and Viglucci, "Strike Called for Tuesday" 1A).

In the strange, self-referential and self-generating media maelstrom, Elián, like Marisylexis, became an object of fascination and of revulsion. The interest in Elián himself took on an obsessive, near-pornographic quality, not only in the exile community that saw him as a "miracle," but in the mainstream press. Progress in the case was described in developmental language--in terms of Elián's body--his haircuts, the loss of his baby tooth, his adorable (abortive) Easter outfit (a "tiny" cream colored *guayavera* with knee pants. Reports often described Elián in "elfin" or "pixie" terms usually ascribed to pre-adolescent girls--at once powerless and vaguely sexualized. On the left, too, progressive accounts and calls to action, described the boy as a passive object for inscription. Even those who professed utter disgust with the entire spectacle had to admit that the brat was cute. In this sense, Latinos, particularly cute, relatively white boys, embody the desires of many--an emblem signifying not only exile fantasies of a return to the fatherland, but moderates' hopes about normalizing relations with Cuba, and conservative desires to domesticate the brown, or in this case, beige hordes.

As Stephanie Smith illustrates children may serve "not only as ciphers for prophesy . . . but as harbingers of potentially disrupting and wholesale cultural change" (*Conceived by Liberty* 181). In the Cuban exile community, the interest in Elián took on messianic, new-age inflected biblical proportions. It was said that the Elijah-child, fished from the Gulf Stream on Thanksgiving and protected by three maternal, and apparently, anti-communist dolphins--heralded the end of our own 40 years wandering in the desert, or at least the shopping mall. Donato Darymple, one of the men who found Elián in the Gulf Stream and who sided with the Miami Gonzalez family quickly became known as "*el*

pescador," a term with clear biblical implications and also a reference to the Virgin of Charity, who appeared to three fishermen. Elián was often referred to as "*el angelito*." Basulto, the leader of Brothers to the Rescue claimed matter of factly: "This was a clear case of a miracle" (Lane, "And a Child Shall Lead Them" 26).

However, details about the angelic nature of Elián circulated alongside minute, ghoulish details about his origins. For example, an oft-mentioned coroner's report revealed Elián's inner tube trailed behind it the body of Merida Barrios, who had been strangled by one of the raft ropes and who and floated like bait yards from Elián. Representations of Elián as both super-human and sub-human suggest that like women, children exist in a twilight realm between the animal and the human, between nature and culture. Children are said to be a blessing - a gift from god. But in many ways, children are, in fact, considered partially barely human. Like animals, children are said to feel pain less than adults. Referring to the traumatic raid, Dr. Marvin Dunn concluded that "children are very resilient. They cope with death and terrible accidents. Children are different" (Brinkley-Rogers, "Boy Will Cope with Scare, Experts Say" 21A). Children are different, indeed. In the rhetoric of "family values" and sacred motherhood, children are described as precious, angelic beings. In reality, those who subsist in material poverty in the United States and around the world are disproportionately women and children. And children have acutely truncated civil rights.¹

¹ They are subject to laws they have no voice in shaping. They can't vote, but can be tried as adults for crimes punishable by death. They are not free to chose religion, have no right to privacy, due process or free speech. The Supreme Court has ruled that principals may censor school newspapers and search students at will (Lacayo, "What Can a Kid Decide?" 32). Children can be refused medical treatment without the consent of a parent—even in a life-threatening case. "Emancipation," establishing legal self-hood separate from one's parents, is close to impossible.

In some ways, children, like women and people of color, exist at an intermediate place between nature and culture, between the animal and the human--an ambiguity which lends them a kind of symbolic flexibility. Indeed, in Elián "it seemed possible to read everything, anything in his deep eyes"(Ramo, "A Big Battle for a Little Boy" 58). But as the Elián case reveals, the figure of the child is no *tabula rasa*, no empty land outside of history, but a highly charged and contested site through which we produce cultural meaning.

Law of the Father

In asserting the right to deny Juan Miguel his son, the Cuban exile lobby employed a circular logic which appealed to the sanctity of the family--effectively painting itself into an ideological corner. Early on, those who wanted Elián to stay in the U.S. made a "fetish of biology," demanding proof of Juan Miguel's paternity. They demanded that Juan Miguel be allowed to come to Miami, where the exile lobby was sure he would defect and remain with his son. However, when Juan Miguel finally arrived in the U.S., he confounded those who can't image that a man might want to raise a child in Cuba rather than America. Unable to discredit the father at the level of genetics or to convince him to stay in the land of Mickey Mouse, conservatives who wanted Elián to stay in the U.S. reversed themselves and appealed to a more abstract notion of fatherhood. In the end, Juan Miguel was able to prove himself not only Elián's biological father, but an involved and affectionate father. He was able to tell INS and State Department officials the boy's shoe size, the names of his teachers, his favorite foods and other details that proved him involved in the boy's life. Cuban exiles were forces to struggle to accommodate a worldview in which Juan Miguel could be both a committed communist and a committed father.

The conclusion of the case, with Juan Miguel refusing to defect and Elián back in Cuba, clearly represents a loss for the Cuban exile lobby. It also, however, amounts to a reassertion of paternal privilege, placing the father squarely at the head of the family, where he "belongs." Legal issues of paternal rights quickly overshadowed the emotional appeals to motherhood in this case, where material mothers seemed curiously visible and yet absent--lacking voice or agency. Juan Miguel's victory represents for many the proper reassertion of paternal authority in face of those dangerous forces which threaten the nuclear family. Anna Quindlan, writing for Newsweek, found the behavior of the Miami community, traditionally a "culture of strong families and strong fathers," objectionable primarily on the grounds that they had betrayed their "family" values. "How could men who proudly proclaim themselves the head of the family wind up trying to relegate this man to a bit part in the life of his eldest son?" ("The Sins of the Fathers" 82). The case resurrected the specter of the Cold War, but it also took us back to a time where there were no troublesome women's issues in the public realm. According to one Time journalist, the beginning of the case revealed that thanks to the advent of feminism, "we have "grown stupid and confused about the meaning of fatherhood." What should properly be a "reflexive respect" for the father's rightful place at the head of the family has "vanished in the incomplete transition out of, er, patriarchy" (Morrow, "The Second-Class Parent" 30).

As a child, Elián represents the not-fully human. But as a white and first-born male child, he will be required to effect a permanent transition into the realm of the rational, the civilized. Indeed, the historical family model that equates the child with the savage also measures humanity against the standard of the white, male child, against which a "host of 'inferior' groups" were "mapped, measured and ranked" (McClintock,

"The Lay of the Land" 51). In Western, industrialized societies, boy children, are, at some point, turned over to men to be "purged" of mother's influence and to achieve full adulthood. "Women perform lower-order conversion from nature to culture, but . . . the higher level is restricted to men" (Ortner, Making Gender 34). If women transformed the raw natural resources into cultural products, then Elián might be considered half cooked--no longer an infant, but not quite ready to assume a place as his father's eldest son.

Back in the "netherworld," or at least the alternate universe that is Cuba, Elián, has continued the training required to become a full citizen in a socialist nation. Soon after his return, Juan Miguel was decorated as a national hero. Elián began the third grade, where he was reported to be at the top of his class. Elián lost his two front "baby" teeth in his last weeks in the U.S. Back in Cuba, Elián's two adult "permanent" adult teeth have, apparently begun to grow in--a mark of his little emerging adult subjectivity.

Many of the reports about Elián in Cuba which have surfaced speak of domestic security and re-productivity. Shortly after his return, Granma International revealed that Elián's half brother has begun to walk on "chubby legs," and that his father and step-mother, Nercy, are expecting another child. Like the national romance which tells us to "be fruitful and multiply," the end of the Elián "story" suggests that a socialized state might best provide the material resources and institutional structures required to actually raise healthy children. No longer displayed like "merchandise," Elián is "free to play" and grow up with the "security that is the socialist state," as his father put it in a speech televised in Cuba shortly after his return to the island.

Elián Nation

In Miami, the conclusion of the case includes repercussions we have yet to sort out. Thus far, the fall-out of the Elián case have included a shake-down at city hall not

unlike a witch hunt--with City Manager "Crazy Joe" Carollo firing all who opposed him in his stand-off with *los federales*. If nothing else, the Elián case made visible the hitherto largely invisible machinations of the CANF, a dangerous and powerful exile lobby intent on interfering with Cuban sovereignty and intent on setting itself up as the "rightful" government of a "free" Cuba. The case, too, like the Mariel crisis in the 1980s, balkanized Miami or rather made clear the tensions of race and class that have long existed in the city. It has called attention to the divisions among "Hispanics," a fictive label which in effect erase historical differences between widely disparate groups.

More over, the case revealed the shifting racial/ethnic position of Cubans in the United States. Once described as "golden exiles," a term which connotes a certain pale or perhaps blond prosperity, Cuban American have become, in the eyes of many, an irrational, sweaty, racially suspect mob. At one point during a march in Miami to keep Elián in the United States, planes flew overhead with banners that read "Don't fight your battles here, go home and fight your war" and "America - love it or leave it, *comprende?*"

At a national level, too, one could easily detect the sneer of racial superiority behind news reports. For instance, when Elián's father, Juan Miguel arrived in the U.S. wearing what appeared to be new shoes, Tony Snow, on the Fox News Roundtable, smugly commented that he was the "best dressed Cuban since Ricky Ricardo." John Derbyshire, who writes for the right-wing National Review, revealed the conservative fear that Elián might "become a poster-child for unrestricted immigration" (Derbyshire, "He Makes Our Field as Plain as Day" 38). In fact, throughout the case, the Cuban American community was described in familiar language of xenophobia – as organic, atavistic, and above all invasive menace.

Unlike many other U.S. Latino groups, Cuban Americans historically possessed a measure of provisional privilege. Certainly, the Cubans who arrived in the U.S. in the first years following the 1959 Cuban revolution were relatively white, upper and middle class, conversant with U.S. consumer culture and often U.S.-educated-- factors which ameliorate perceptions of racial otherness. These earliest waves of Cold War Cuban émigrés--neat, nuclear families fleeing communism--were welcome with open arms. In fact, the U.S. government literally re-wrote immigration policies to accommodate the "golden exiles." In the early 1960s, the national news media mythologized the "Cuban success story" with articles proclaiming the Cubans to be the newest Horacio Algers. "In an era of social upheaval . . . the Cubans seemed to prove that the American dream was strong and intact. (Havana USA 110)

Today, Cuban Americans occupy an ambiguous in-between position. They have managed to assimilate structurally without assimilating culturally, possessing institutional power, yet maintaining markers of ethnicity like the use of Spanish. Their shifting position is perhaps best illustrated by the bizarre "wet foot" law that governs Cuban immigration. Once upon a time, Cubans intercepted at sea were brought to the United States, where they were given immediate asylum--a privilege not extended to any other immigrant group. Today, the wet foot law grants Cubans who reach U.S. soil temporary resident status, a suicidal hope that inspires many, like Elián's mother, to take to the sea. Those caught at sea, however, are repatriated -- a strange situation with horrific consequences. Those who manage to touch land, even if they have to outrun Coast Guard agents to do so, enter into a new realm entirely. The law situates Cubans in a strange limbo as promising and murderous as the Florida Straits--one moment, shark bait, the next, heroes.

In Miami, the force of the Elián spectacle seems to have spent itself and the exile community has settled into a sense of *disgusto*--a feeling generally reserved for disappointed and long-suffering mothers. In 2001, the Gonzalez home was opened as the Elián Museum, and Marisleysis ended her seclusion by opening a beauty salon in the heart of Eighth Street. (She was voted "Woman of the Year" in 2001 by officials of the Cuban American International Beauty Pageant.) Donato Darymple, also known as the Fisherman, culminated his career as professional hanger-on by appearing on "Fifteen Minutes," a self-consciously shameless television show specializing in such antics as celebrity boxing.

The Cuban exile community proclaimed the child an emissary from god and the virgin--a sign that their 40 years of exile was at an end. However, there are those who see in the boy another cosmology, another family feud of equally epic proportions. Indeed, *santeros* read Elián as an embodiment not of Elijah, but of Eleguá--the mischievous *orisha* who resides at the crossroads of reality and who sometimes manifests himself as a playful child. Eleguá, like Elián, thus represents potentiality--change and creative chaos.

In the Afro-Cuban pantheon, Eleguá--with his two tongues and his enormous phallus--is the great translator, the interpreter and intermediary. It is he who must be approached before petitioning any other *orisha*, as he carries the petition from this world to the other. Those who would build around the boy a project to normalize relations with Cuba--like those who tried to use him to work out a sense of spite or revenge--would do well to remember that Eleguá is, in effect, crippled by the task of mediating between two worlds. He limps to represent that he drags one foot in one realm and one in the other. We can only wonder what long-term price Elián and Marisleysis Gonzalez paid for

representing an exile "nation" in which they have little actual agency--in which they link and embody, but do not actually participate as active subjects.

The case did, however, force communication between U.S. and Cuban officials -- a rare event. The case also stimulated some discussion about children's rights and immigration law. Elián was evidence that despite the non-place of time to which we have relegated the island and its inhabitants, Cubans are real people, that they are even good parents, for heaven's sake. The case challenged our most basic assumptions about the "prison" island and about American's unquestionable superiority at a time when many have begun to question the soundness (or even sanity) of the embargo.

The case also revealed complex generational and ideological divisions in an exile community traditionally represented by the most vocal, powerful and strident elements the exile lobby. The work of authors like Pérez Firmat, writing only from "memory," maintains a posture that widens the gulf between Cubans nationals and Cuban expatriates. He defines exile identity in rigid terms that ultimately prove reductive and potentially dangerous. But others, like the bridge-building authors I examine in my last chapter, challenge exile politics in their desire to normalize relations with Cuba. These authors work to establish and maintain emotional and artistic links to Cuba and travel to the island in an attempt to reconcile their sense of self.

In the context of such a bridge-building movement, the uproar generated by the Elián Gonzalez case may thus prove more than just a momentary madness. The passion play perhaps marks a turning point in U.S. Cuba relations. For a time, the case seemed to have actually eased relations between Cuba and the United States. One could argue that in some sense the case "made straight the way" as the prolonged case forced U.S. officials and Cuban officials to communicate with one another in a rare example of cooperation.

Even as the Elián saga unfolded, bills in Congress designed to loosen the embargo were being hotly debated. Just after the Elián case, the first shipment of U.S. grain was quietly shipped to Cuba for the first time in over forty years under a bill conceived by an unlikely contingent of North American farmers, clerics and congressmen. Perhaps this Eleguá child, who opens doors and heralds change, may be an emissary after all. Or perhaps he was just a scrumptious and well turned-out sacrificial lamb.

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BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH

María del Carmen Martínez currently lives in Milwaukee and teaches at the University of Wisconsin Parkside. She shares her home with her partner Charles Tennesen and fat, mean-tempered refugees of many species. They have plans to renovate a historic farmstead, raise goats and go "off-grid."

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



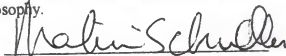
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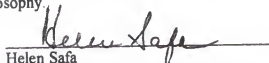
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This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

August 2005

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